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Short Stories
of To-day and Yesterday

ALGERNON BLACKWOOD

PRESENTATION

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SHORT STORIES *of*
TO-DAY & YESTERDAY

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PRESENTATION

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Short Stories
of To-day and Yesterday

ALGERNON
BLACKWOOD



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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

THROUGHOUT a very large part of Mr Blackwood's writing there runs a feeling for the mystery and awesomeness of high places. It is not the ostentatious pride of the mountaineer, who collects summits as an Indian brave gathered scalps, but rather the earnestness with which, as Mr Blackwood himself says, "a holy man might approach a solemn festival of his church." The same feeling is seen in his treatment of elemental things like wind and flame. To him they typify the life-giving and purifying forces which alone make existence possible. In these pages the things that matter are odd meetings, queer coincidences, unaccountable premonitions, and haunting memories. Whatever is fantastic and bizarre takes on a newer and deeper import. It becomes, indeed, the only truly reasonable thing. On the other hand, what we are accustomed to term solid reality loses its meaning and shrivels into insignificance. Most mysterious of all is the baffling problem of one's own personality, which offers unending conundrums that seem impossible of solution. We are incomprehensible beings in very strange surroundings.

That is the world to which Mr Blackwood is ready to conduct you in these stories, and if you would know what manner of man your conductor is, and what his own experiences have been, you cannot do



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THE REGENERATION OF LORD ERNIE

JOHN HENDRICKS was bear-leading at the time. He had originally studied for Holy Orders, but had abandoned the Church later for private reasons connected with his faith, and had taken to teaching and tutoring instead. He was an honest, upstanding fellow of five-and-thirty, incorruptible, intelligent in a simple, straightforward way. He played games with his head, more than most Englishmen do, but he went through life without much calculation. He had qualities that made boys like and respect him; he won their confidence. Poor, proud, ambitious, he realized that fate offered him a chance when the Secretary of State for Scotland asked him if he would give up his other pupils for a year and take his son, Lord Ernie, round the world upon an educational trip that might make a man of him. For Lord Ernie was the only son, and the Marquess's influence was naturally great. To have deposited a regenerated Lord Ernie at the castle gates might have guaranteed Hendricks' future. After leaving Eton prematurely the lad had come under Hendricks' charge for a time, and with such excellent results—"I'd simply swear by that chap, you

know," the boy used to say—that his father, considerably impressed, and rather as a last resort, had made this proposition. And Hendricks, without much calculation, had accepted it. He liked "Bindy" for himself. It was in his heart to "make a man of him," if possible. They had now been round the world together and had come up from Brindisi to the Italian Lakes, and so into Switzerland. It was middle October. With a week or two to spare they were making leisurely for the ancestral halls in Aberdeenshire.

The nine months' travel, Hendricks realized with keen disappointment, had accomplished, however, very little. The job had been exhausting, and he had conscientiously done his best. Lord Ernie liked him thoroughly, admiring his vigour with a smile of tolerant good-nature through his ceaseless cigarette-smoke. They were almost like two boys together. "*You are* a chap and a half, Mr Hendricks. You really ought to be in the Cabinet with my father." Hendricks would deliver up his useless parcel at the castle gates, pocket the thanks and the hard-earned fee, and go back to his arduous life of teaching and writing in dingy lodgings. It was a pity, even on the lowest grounds. The tutor, truth to tell, felt undeniably depressed. Hopeful by nature, optimistic, too, as men of action usually are, he cast about him, even at the last hour, for something that might stir the boy to life, wake him up, put zest and energy into him. But there was only Paris now be-

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tween them and the end; and Paris certainly could not be relied upon for help. Bindy's desire for Paris even was not strong enough to count. No desire in him was ever strong. There lay the crux of the problem in a word—Lord Ernie was without desire, which is life.

Tall, well-built, handsome, he was yet such a feeble creature, without the energy to be either wild or vicious. Languid, yet certainly not decadent, life ran slowly, flabbily in him. He took to nothing. The first impression he made was fine—then nothing. His only tastes, if tastes they could be called, were out-of-door tastes: he was vaguely interested in flying, yet not enough to master the mechanism of it; he liked motoring at high speed, being driven, not driving himself; and he loved to wander about in woods, making fires like a Red Indian, provided they lit easily, yet even this, not for the poetry of the thing nor for any love of adventure, but just 'because.' "I like fire, you know; like to watch it burn." Heat seemed to give him curious satisfaction, perhaps because the heat of life, he realized, was deficient in his six-foot body. It was significant, this love of fire in him, though no one could discover why. As a child he had a dangerous delight in fireworks—anything to do with fire. He would watch a candle-flame as though he were a fire-worshipper, but had never been known to make a single remark of interest about it. In a wood, as mentioned, the first thing he did was to gather sticks—though the resulting

fire was never part of any purpose. He had no purpose. There was no wind or fire of life in the lad at all. The fine body was inert.

Hendricks did wrong, of course, in going where he did—to this little desolate village in the Jura Mountains—though it was the first time all these trying months he had allowed himself a personal desire. But from Domo Dossola the Simplon Express would pass Lausanne, and from Lausanne to the Jura was but a step—all on the way home, moreover. And what prompted him was merely a sentimental desire to revisit the place where ten years before he had fallen violently in love with the pretty daughter of the Pasteur, M. Leysin, in whose house he lodged. He had gone there to learn French. The very slight *détour* seemed pardonable.

His spiritless charge was easily persuaded.

"We might go home by Pontarlier instead of Bâle, and get a glimpse of the Jura," he suggested. "The line slides along its frontiers a bit, and then goes bang across it. We might even stop off a night on the way—if you cared about it. I know a curious old village—Villaret—where I went at your age to pick up French."

"Top-hole," replied Lord Ernie listlessly. "All on the way to Paris, ain't it?"

"Of course. You see there's a fortnight before we need get home."

"So there is, yes. Let's go." He felt it was almost his own idea, and that he decided it.

"If you'd *really* like it."

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"Oh, yes. Why not? I'm sick of cities." He flicked some dust off his coat-sleeve with an immaculate silk handkerchief, then lit a cigarette. "Just as you like," he added with a drawl and a smile. "I'm ready for anything." There was no keenness, no personal desire, no choice in reality at all; flabby good-nature merely.

A suggestion was invariably enough, as though the boy had no will of his own, his opposition rarely more than negative sulking that soon flattened out because it was forgotten. Indeed, no sign of positive life lay in him anywhere—no vitality, aggression, coherence of desire and will; vacuous rather than imbecile; unable to go forward upon any definite line of his own, as though all wheels had slipped their cogs; a pasty soul that took good enough impressions, yet never mastered them for permanent use. Nothing stuck. He would never make a politician, much less a statesman. The family title would be borne by a nincompoop. Yet all the machinery was there, one felt—if only it could be driven, made to go. It was sad. Lord Ernie was heir to great estates, with a name and position that might influence thousands.

And Hendricks had been a good selection, with his virility and gentle, understanding firmness. He understood the problem. "You'll do what no one else could," the anxious father told him, "for he worships you, and you can sting without hurting him. You'll put life and interest into him if anybody in this world can.

I have great hopes of this tour. I shall always be in your debt, Mr Hendricks." And Hendricks had accepted the onerous duty in his big, high-minded way. He was conscientious to the back-bone. This little side-trip was his sole deflection, if such it can be called even. "Life, light, and cheerful influences," had been his instructions, "nothing dull or melancholy; an occasional fling, if he wants it—I'd welcome a fling as a good sign—and as much intercourse with decent people and stimulating sight-seeing as you can manage—or can stand," the Marquess added with a smile. "Only you won't overtax the lad, will you? Above all, let him think *he* chooses and decides, when possible."

Villaret, however, hardly complied with these conditions; there was melancholy in it; Hendricks' mind—whose reflexes the spongy nature of the empty lad absorbed too easily—would be in a minor key. Yet a night could work no harm. Whence came, he wondered, the fleeting notion that it might do good? Was it, perhaps, that Leysin, the vigorous old Pasteur, might contribute something? Leysin had been a considerable force in his own development, he remembered; they had corresponded a little since; Leysin was out of the common, certainly, restless energy in him as of the sea. Hendricks found difficulty in sorting out his thoughts and motives, but Leysin was in them somewhere—this idea that his energetic personality might help. His vitalizing effect, at least, would counteract the melancholy.

For Villaret lay huddled upon unstimulating slopes, the robe of gloomy pine-woods sweeping down towards its poverty from bleak heights and desolate gorges. The peasants were morose, ill-living folk. It was a dark, untaught corner in a range of otherwise fairy mountains, a backwater the sun had neglected to clean out. Superstitions, Hendricks remembered, of incredible kind still lingered there; a touch of the sinister hovered about the composite mind of its inhabitants. The Pasteur fought strenuously this blackness in their lives and thoughts; in the village itself with more or less success—though even there the drinking and habits of living were utterly unsweetened—but on the heights, among the somewhat arid pastures, the mountain men remained untamed, turbulent, even menacing. Hendricks knew this of old, though he had never understood too well. But he remembered how the English boys at *la cure* were forbidden to climb in certain directions, because the life in these scattered *châlets* was somehow loose and violent. There was danger there, the danger, however, never definitely stated. Those lonely ridges lay cursed beneath dark skies. He remembered, too, the savage dogs, the difficulty of approach, the aggressive attitude toward the plucky Pasteur's visits to these remote upland *pâturages*. They did not lie in his parish: Leysin made his occasional visits as man and missionary; for extraordinary rumours, Hendricks recalled, were rife, of some queer worship of their own these

lawless peasants kept alive in their distant, windy territory, planted there first, the story had it, by some renegade priest whose name was now forgotten.

Hendricks himself had no personal experiences. He had been too deeply in love to trouble about outside things, however strange. But Marston's case had never quite left his memory—Marston, who climbed up by unlawful ways, stayed away two whole days and nights, and came back suddenly with his air of being broken, shattered, appallingly used up, his face so lined and strained it seemed aged by twenty years, and yet with a singular new life in him, so vehement, loud, and reckless, it was like a kind of sober intoxication. He was packed off to England before he could relate anything. But he had suffered shocks. His white, passionate face, his boisterous new vigour, the way M. Leysin screened his view of the heights as he put him personally into the Paris train—almost as though he feared the boy would see the hills and make another dash for them!—made up an unforgettable picture in the mind.

Moreover, between the sodden village and that string of evil *châlets* that lay in their dark line upon the heights there had been links. Exactly of what nature he never knew, for love made all else uninteresting; only he remembered swarthy, dark-faced messengers descending into the sleepy hamlet from time to time, big, mountain-limbed fellows with wind in their hair and fire in their eyes; that their visits

produced commotion and excitement of difficult kinds; that wild orgies invariably followed in their wake; and that, when the messengers went back, they did not go alone. There was life up there, whereas the village was moribund. And none who went ever cared to return. Cudrefin, the young giant *vigneron*, taken in this way, from the very side of his sweetheart too, came back two years later as a messenger himself. He did not even ask for the girl, who had meanwhile married another. "There's life up there with us," he told the drunken loafers in the "Guillaume Tell," "wind and fire to make you spin to the devil—or to heaven!" He was enthusiasm personified. In the village he had been merely drinking himself stupidly to death. Vaguely, too, Hendricks remembered visits of police from the neighbouring town, some of them on horseback, all armed, and that once even soldiers accompanied them; and on another occasion a bishop, or whatever the Church dignitary was called, had arrived suddenly and promised radical assistance of a spiritual kind that had never materialized—oh, and many other details that now trooped back with suggestions time had certainly not made smaller. For the love had passed along its way and gone, and he was free now to the invasion of other memories, dwarfed at the time by that dominating, sweet passion.

Yet all the tutor wanted now, this chance week in late October, was to see again the corner of the mossy forest where he had known that

marvellous thing, first love; renew his link with Leysin, who had taught him much; and see if, perchance, this man's stalwart, virile energy might possibly overflow with benefit into his listless charge. The expenses he meant to pay out of his own pocket. Those wild pagans on the heights—even if they still existed—there was no need to mention. Lord Ernie knew little French, and certainly no word of *patois*. For one night, or even two, the risk was negligible.

Was there, indeed, risk at all of any sort? Was not this vague uneasiness he felt merely conscience faintly pricking? He could not feel that he was doing wrong. At worst, the youth might feel depression for a few hours—speedily curable by taking the train.

Something, nevertheless, did gnaw at him in subconscious fashion, producing a sense of apprehension; and he came to the conclusion that this memory of the mountain tribe was the cause of it—a revival of forgotten boyhood's awe. He glanced across at the figure of Bindy lounging upon the hotel lawn in an easy-chair, full in the sunshine, a newspaper at his feet. Reclining there, he looked so big and strong and handsome, yet in reality was but a painted lath without resistance, much less attack, in all his many inches. And suddenly the tutor recalled another thing, the link, however, undiscoverable, and it was this: that the boy's mother, a Canadian, had suffered once severely from a winter in Quebec, where the Marquess

had first made her acquaintance. Frost had robbed her, if he remembered rightly, of a foot—with the result, at any rate, that she had a wholesome terror of the cold. She sought heat and sun instinctively—fire. Also, that asthma had been her sore affliction—sheer inability to take a full, deep breath. This deficiency of heat and air, therefore, was in her mind. And he knew that Bindy's birth had been an anxious time, the anxiety justified, moreover, since she had yielded up her life for him.

And so the singular thought flashed through him suddenly as he watched the reclining, languid boy, Cudrefin's descriptive phrase oddly singing in his head—

“Heat and fire, fire and wind—why, the very things he lacks! And he's always after them. I wonder——!”

II

The lumbering yellow diligence brought them up from the lake shore, a long two hours, deposited them at the opening of the village street, and went its grinding, toiling way toward the frontier. They arrived in a blur of rain. It was evening. Lowering clouds drew night before her time upon the world, obscuring the distant summits of the Oberland, but lights twinkled here and there in the nearer landscape, mapping the gloom with signals. The village was very still. Above and below it, however, two big winds were at work, with curious

results. For a lower wind from the east in gusty draughts drove the body of the lake into quick white horses which shone like wings against the deep *basses Alpes*, while a westerly current swept the heights immediately above the village. There was this odd division of two weathers, presaging a change. A narrow line of clear bright sky showed up the Jura outline finely toward the north, stars peeping sharply through the pale moist spaces. Hurrying vapours, driven by the upper westerly wind, concealed them thinly. They flashed and vanished. The entire ridge, five thousand feet in the air, had an appearance of moving through the sky. Between these opposing winds at different levels the village itself lay motionless, while the world slid past, as it were, in two directions.

"The earth seems turning round," remarked Lord Ernie. He had been reading a novel all day in train and steamer, and smoking endless cigarettes in the diligence, his companion and himself its only occupants. He seemed suddenly to have waked up. "What is it?" he asked with interest.

Hendricks explained the queer effect of the two contrary winds. Columns of peat-smoke rose in thin straight lines from the blur of houses, untouched by the careering currents above and below. The winds whirled round them.

Lord Ernie listened attentively to the explanation.

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"I feel as if I were spinning with it—like a top," he observed, putting his hand to his head a moment. "And what are those lights up there?"

He pointed to the distant ridge, where fires were blazing as though stars had fallen and set fire to the trees. Several were visible, at regular intervals. The sharp summits of the limestone mountains cut hard into the clear spaces of northern sky thousands of feet above.

"Oh, the peasants burning wood and stuff, I suppose," the tutor told him.

The youth turned an instant, standing still to examine them with a shading hand.

"People live up there?" he asked. There was surprise in his voice, and his body stiffened oddly as he spoke.

"In mountain *châlets*, yes," replied the other a trifle impatiently, noticing his attitude. "Come along now," he added, "let's get to our rooms in the carpenter's house before the rain comes down. You can see the windows twinkling over there," and he pointed to a building near the church. "The storm will catch us." They moved quickly down the deserted street together in the deepening gloom, passing little gardens, doors of open barns, straggling manure heaps, and courtyards of cobbled stones, where the occasional figure of a man was seen. But Lord Ernie lingered behind, half loitering. Once or twice, to the other's increasing annoyance, he paused, standing still to watch the heights through openings between the tumble-down old

houses. Half a dozen big drops of rain splashed heavily on the road.

"Hurry up!" cried Hendricks, looking back, "or we shall be caught. It's the mountain wind—the *coup de joran*. You can hear it coming!" For the lad was peering across a low wall in an attitude of fixed attention. He made a gesture with one hand, as though he signalled towards the ridges where the fires blazed. Hendricks called pretty sharply to him then. It was possible, of course, that he misinterpreted the movement; it *may* merely have been that he passed his fingers through his hair, across his eyes, or used the palm to focus sight, for his hat was off and the light was quite uncertain. Only Hendricks did not like the lingering or the gesture. He put authority into his tone at once. "Come along, will you; come along, Bindy!" he called.

The answer filled him with amazement.

"All right, all right. I'll follow in a moment. I like this."

The tutor went back a few steps towards him. The tone startled him.

"Like what?" he asked.

And Lord Ernie turned towards him with another face. There was fighting in it. There was resolution.

"This, of course," the boy answered steadily, but with excitement shut down behind, as he waved one arm towards the mountains. "I've dreamed this sort of thing; I've known it somewhere. We've seen nothing like it all our stupid trip." The flash in his brown eyes

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passed then, as he added more quietly, but with firmness: "Don't wait for me; I'll follow."

Hendricks stood still in his tracks. There was a decision in the voice and manner that arrested him. The confidence, the positive statement, the eager desire, the hint of energy—all this was new. He had never encouraged the boy's habit of vivid dreaming, deeming the narration unwise. It flashed across him suddenly now that the 'deficiency' might be only on the surface. Energy and life hid, perhaps, subconsciously in him. Did the dreams betray an activity he knew not how to carry through and correlate with his everyday, external world? And were these dreams evidence of deep, hidden desire—a clue, possibly, to the energy he sought and needed, the exact kind of energy that might set the inert machinery in motion and drive it?

He hesitated an instant, waiting in the road. He was on the verge of understanding something that yet just evaded him. Bindy's childish, instinctive love of fire, his passion for air, for rushing wind, for oceans of limitless——

There came at that moment a deep roaring in the mountains. Far away, but rapidly approaching, the ominous booming of it filled the air. The westerly wind descended by the deep gorges, shaking the forests, shouting as it came. Clouds of white dust spiralled into the sky off the upper roads, spread into sheets like snow, and swept downwards with incredible velocity. The air turned suddenly cooler. More big drops of rain splashed and thudded

on the roofs and road. There was a feeling of something violent and instantaneous about to happen, a sense almost of attack. The *joran* tore headlong down into the valley.

"Come on, man," he cried at the top of his voice. "That's the *joran*! I know it of old! It's terrific. Run!" And he caught the lad, still lingering, by the arm.

But Lord Ernie shook himself free with an excitement almost violent.

"I've been up there with those great fires," he shouted. "I know the whole blessed thing. But where was it? Where?" His face was white, eyes shining, manner strangely agitated. "Big, naked fellows who dance like wind, and rushing women of fire, and——"

Two things happened then, interrupting the boy's wild language. The *joran* reached the village and struck it; the houses shook, the trees bent double, and the cloud of limestone dust, painting the darkness white, swept on between Hendricks and the boy with extraordinary force, even separating them. There was a clatter of falling tiles, of banging doors and windows, and then a burst of icy rain that fell like iron shot on everything, raising actual spray. The air was in an instant thick. Everything drove past, roared, trembled. And, secondly—just in that brief instant when man and boy were separated—there shot between them with shadowy swiftness the figure of a man, hatless, with flying hair, who vanished with running strides into the darkness of the village street

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beyond—all so rapidly that sight could focus the manner neither of his coming nor of his going. Hendricks caught a glimpse of a swarthy, elemental type of face, the swing of great shoulders, the leap of big loose limbs—something rushing and elastic in the whole appearance—but nothing he could claim for definite detail. The figure swept through the dust and wind like an animal—and was gone. It was, indeed, only the contrast of Lord Ernie's whitened skin, of his graceful, half-elegant outline, that enabled him to recall the details that he did. The weather-beaten visage seemed to storm away. Bindy's delicate aristocratic face shone so pale and eager. But that a real man had passed was indubitable, for the boy made a flurried movement as though to follow. Hendricks caught his arm with a determined grip and pulled him back.

"Who was that? Who was it?" Lord Ernie cried breathlessly, resisting with all his strength, but vainly.

"Some mountain fellow, of course. Nothing to do with us." And he dragged the boy after him down the road. For a second both seemed to have lost their heads. Hendricks certainly felt a gust of something strike him into momentary consternation that was half alarm.

"From up there, where the fires are?" asked the boy, shouting above the wind and rain.

"Yes, yes, I suppose so. Come along. We shall be soused. Are you mad?" For Bindy still held back with all his weight, trying to turn

round and see. Hendricks used more force. There was almost a scuffle in the road.

"All right, I'm coming. I only wanted to look a second. You needn't drag my arm out." He ceased resistance, and they lurched forward together. "But what a chap he was! He went like the wind. Did you see the light streaming out of him—like fire?"

"Like what?" shouted Hendricks, as they dashed now through the driving tempest.

"Fire!" bawled the boy. "It lit me up as he passed—fire that lights but does not burn, and wind that blows the world along——"

"Button your coat and run!" interrupted the other, hurrying his pace, and pulling the lad forcibly after him.

"Don't twist! You're hurting! I can run as well as you!" came back, with an energy Bindy had never shown before in his life. He was breathless, panting, charged with excitement still. "It touched me as he passed—fire that lights but does not burn, and wind that blows the heart to flame—let me go, will you? Let go my hand."

He dashed free and away. The torrential rain came down in sheets now from a windless sky, for the *joran* was already miles beyond them, tearing across the angry lake. They reached the carpenter's house, where their lodging was, soaked to the skin. They dried themselves, and ate the light supper of soup and omelette prepared for them—ate it in their dressing-gowns. Lord Ernie went to bed with a hot-water bottle of rough stone. He declared

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with decision that he felt no chill. His excitement had somewhat passed.

"But, I say, Mr Hendricks," he remarked, as he settled down with his novel and a cigarette, calmed and normal again, "this *is* a place and a half, isn't it? It stirs me all up. I suppose it's the storm. What do *you* think?"

"Electrical state of the air, yes," replied the tutor briefly.

Soon afterwards he closed the shutters on the weather side, said good-night, and went into his own room to unpack. The singular phrase Bindy had used kept singing through his head: "Fire that lights but does not burn, and wind that blows the heart to flame"—the first time he had said "blows the world along." Where on earth had the boy got hold of such queer words? He still saw the figure of that wild mountain fellow who had passed between them with the dust and wind and rain. There was confusion in the picture, or, rather, in his memory of it, perhaps. But it seemed to him, looking back now, that the man in passing had paused a second—the briefest second merely—and had spoken, or, at any rate, had stared closely a moment into Bindy's face, and that some communication had been between them in that moment of elemental violence.

III

Pasteur Leysin Hendricks remembered very well. Even now in his old age he was a vigorous personality, but in his youth he had been

almost revolutionary; wild enough, too, it was rumoured, until he had turned to God of his own accord as offering a larger field for his strenuous vitality. The little man was possessed of tireless life, a born leader of forlorn hopes, attack his *métier*, and heavy odds the conditions that he loved. Before settling down in this isolated spot—*pasteur de l'église indépendante* in a Protestant canton—he had been a missionary in remote pagan lands. His horizon was a big one, he had seen strange things. An uncouth being, with a large head upon a thin and wiry body supported by steely bowed legs, he had that courage which makes itself known in advance of any proof. Hendricks slipped over to *la cure* about nine o'clock and found him in his study. Lord Ernie was asleep; at least his light was out, no sound or movement audible from his room. The *joran* had swept the heavens of clouds. Stars shone brilliantly. The fires still blazed faintly upon the heights.

The visit was not unexpected, for Hendricks had already sent a message to announce himself, and the moment he sat down, met the Pasteur's eye, heard his voice, and observed his slight imperious gestures, he passed under the influence of a personality stronger than his own. Something in Leysin's atmosphere stretched him, lifting his horizon. He had come chiefly—he now realized it—to borrow help and explanation with regard to Lord Ernie; the events of two hours before had impressed him more than he quite cared to own, and he wished to talk

about it. But, somehow, he found it difficult to state his case; no opening presented itself; or, rather, the Pasteur's mind, intent upon something of his own, was too preoccupied. In reply to a question presently, the tutor gave a brief outline of his present duties, but omitted the scene of excitement in the village street, for as he watched the furrowed face in the light of the study lamp he realized both anxiety and spiritual high pressure at work below the surface there. He hesitated to intrude his own affairs at first. They discussed, nevertheless, the psychology of the boy, and the unfavourable chances of regeneration, while the old man's face lit up and flashed from time to time, until at length the truth came out, and Hendricks understood his friend's preoccupation.

"What you're attempting with an individual," Leysin exclaimed with ardour, "is precisely what I'm attempting with a crowd. And it's difficult. For poor sinners make poor saints, and the lukewarm I will spew out of my mouth." He made an abrupt, resentful gesture to signify his disgust and weariness, perhaps his contempt as well. "Cut it down! Why cumbereth it the ground?"

"A hard, uncharitable doctrine," began the tutor, realizing that he must discuss the parish before he could introduce Bindy's case effectively. "You mean, of course, that there's no material to work on?"

"No energy to direct," was the emphatic reply. "My sheep here are—real sheep; mere negative,

drink-sodden loafers without desire. Hospital cases! I could work with tigers and wild beasts, but who ever trained a slug?"

"Your proper place is on the heights," suggested Hendricks, interrupting at a venture. "There's scope enough up there, or used to be. Have they died out, those wild men of the mountains?" And hit by chance the target in the bull's-eye.

The old man's face turned younger as he answered quickly.

"Men like that," he exclaimed, "do not die off. They breed and multiply." He leaned forward across the table, his manner eager, fervent, almost impetuous with suppressed desire for action. "There's evil-thinking up there," he said suggestively, "but, by heaven, it's alive; it's positive, ambitious, constructive. With violent feeling and strong desire to work on, there's hope of some result. Upon vehement impulses like that, pagan or anything else, a man can work with a will. Those are the tigers; down here I have the slugs!"

He shrugged his shoulders and leaned back into his chair. Hendricks watched him, thinking of the stories told about his missionary days among savage and barbarian tribes.

"Born of the vital landscape, I suppose?" he asked. "Wind and frost and blazing sun. Their wild energy, I mean, is due to——"

A gesture from the old man stopped him. "You know who started them upon their wild performances," he said gravely in a lower

voice; "you know how that ambitious renegade priest from the Valais chose them for his nucleus, then died before he could lead them out, trained and competent, upon his strange campaign? You heard the story when you were with me as a boy——?"

"I remember Marston," put in the other, uncommonly interested, "Marston—the boy who——" He stopped because he hardly knew how to continue. There was a minute's silence. But it was not an empty silence, though no word broke it.

Leysin's face was a study.

"Ah, Marston, yes," he said slowly, without looking up; "you remember him. But that is at my door, too, I suppose. His father was ignorant and obstinate; I might have saved him otherwise." He seemed talking to himself rather than to his listener. Pain showed in the lines about the rugged mouth. "There was no one, you see, who knew how to direct the great life that woke in the lad. He took it back with him, and turned it loose into all manner of useless enterprises, and the doctors mistook his abrupt and fierce ambitions for—for the hysteria which they called the vestibule of lunacy. . . . Yet small characters may have big ideas. . . . They didn't understand, of course. . . . It was sad, sad, sad." He hid his face in his hands a moment.

"Marston went wrong, then, in the end?" for the other's manner suggested disaster of some kind. Hendricks asked it in a whisper.

Leysin uncovered his face, looped his neck with one finger, and pointed to the ceiling.

"Hanged himself!" murmured Hendricks, shocked.

The Pasteur nodded, but there was impatience, half anger in his tone.

"They checked it, kept it in. Of course, it tore him!"

The two men looked into each other's eyes for a moment, and something in the younger of them shrank. This was all beyond his ken a little. An odd hint of bleak and cruel reality was in the air, making him shiver along nerves that were normally inactive. The uneasiness he felt about Lord Ernie became alarm. His conscience pricked him.

"More than he could assimilate," continued Leysin. "It broke him. Yet, had outlets been provided, had he been taught how to use it, this elemental energy drawn direct from Nature——" He broke off abruptly, struck perhaps by the expression in his listener's eyes. "It seems incredible, doesn't it, in the twentieth century? I know."

"Evil?" asked Hendricks, stammering rather.

"Why evil?" was the impatient reply.

"How can any force be evil? That's merely a question of direction."

"And the priest who discovered these forces and taught their use, then——?"

"Was genuinely spiritual and followed the truth in his own way. He was not necessarily evil." The little Pasteur spoke with vehemence.

"You talk like the religion-primers in the kindergarten," he went on. "Listen. This man, sick and weary of his lukewarm flock, sought vital, stalwart systems who might be clean enough to use the elemental powers he had discovered how to attract. Only the bias of the users could make it 'evil' by wrong use. His idea was big and even holy—to train a corps that might regenerate the world. And he chose unreasoning, unintellectual types with a purpose—primitive, giant men who could assimilate the force without risk of being shattered. Under his direction he intended they should prove as effective as the twelve disciples of old who were fisher-folk. And, had he gone on——"

"He, too, failed then?" asked the other, whose tangled thoughts struggled with incredulity and belief as he heard this strange new thing. "He died, you mean?"

"*Maison de santé*," was the laconic reply, "strait-waistcoats, padded cells, and the rest; but still alive, I'm told. It was more than he could manage."

It was a startling story, even in this brief outline, deep suggestion in it. The tutor's sense of being out of his depth increased. After nine months with a lifeless, devitalized human being, this was—well, he seemed to have fallen in his sleep from a comfortable bed into a raging mountain torrent. Strong currents rushed through and over him. The lonely, peaceful village outside, sleeping beneath the stars, heightened the contrast.

"Suppressed or misdirected energy again, I suppose," he said in a low tone, respecting his companion's emotion. "And these mountain men," he asked abruptly, "do they still keep up their—practices?"

"Their ceremonies, yes," corrected the other, master of himself again. "Turbulent moments of nature, storms and the like, stir them to clumsy rehearsals of once vital rituals—not entirely ineffective, even in their incompleteness, but dangerous for that very reason. This *joran*, for instance, invariably communicates something of its atmospherical energy to themselves. They light their fires as of old. They blunder through what they remember of *his* ceremonies. With the glasses you may see them in their dozens, men and women, leaping and dancing. It's an amazing sight, great beauty in it, impossible to witness even from a distance without feeling the desire to take part in it. Even my people feel it—the only time they ever get alive"—he jerked his big head contemptuously toward the street—"or feel desire to act. And someone from the heights—a messenger perhaps—will be down later, this very evening probably, on the hunt——"

"On the hunt?" Hendricks asked it half below his breath. He felt a touch of awe as he heard this experienced, genuinely religious man speak with conviction of such curious things. "On the hunt?" he repeated more eagerly.

"Messengers do come down," was the reply. "A living belief always seeks to increase, to

grow, to add to itself. Where there's conviction there's always propaganda."

"Ah, converts——?"

Leysin shrugged his big black shoulders. "Desire to add to their number—desire to *save*," he said. "The energy they absorb overflows, that's all."

The Englishman debated several questions vaguely in his mind; only his mind, being disturbed, could not hold the balance exactly true. Leysin's influence, as of old, was upon him. A possibility, remote, seductive, dangerous, began to beckon to him, but from somewhere just outside his reasoning mind.

"And they always know when one of their kind is near," the voice slipped in between his tumbling thoughts, "as though they get it instinctively from these universal elements they worship. They select their recruits with marvellous judgment and precision. No messenger ever goes back alone; nor has a recruit ever been known to return to the lazy squalor of the conditions whence he escaped."

The younger man sat upright in his chair, suddenly alert, and the gesture that he made unconsciously might have been read by a keen psychiatrist as evidence of mental self-defence. He felt the forbidden impulse in him gathering force, and tried to call a halt. At any rate, he called upon the other man to be explicit. He inquired point-blank what this religion of the heights might be. What were these elements

these people worshipped? In what did their wild ceremonies consist?

And Leysin, breaking bounds, let his speech burst forth in a stream of explanation, learned of actual knowledge, as he claimed, and uttered with a vehement conviction that produced an undeniable effect upon his astonished listener. Told by no dreamer, but by a righteous man who lived, not merely preached, his certain faith, Hendricks, before the half was heard, forgot what age and land he dwelt in. Whole blocks of conventional belief crumbled and fell away. Brick walls erected by routine to mark narrow paths of proper conduct—safe, moral, advisable conduct—thawed and vanished. Through the ruins, scrambling at him from huge horizons never recognized before, came all manner of marvellous possibilities. The little confinement of modern thought appalled him suddenly. Leysin spoke slowly, said little, was not even speculative. It was no mere magic of words that made the dim-lit study swim these deep waters beyond the ripple of pert creeds, but rather the overwhelming sense of sure conviction driving behind the statements. The little man had witnessed curious things, yes, in his missionary days, and that he had found truth in them in place of ignorant nonsense was remarkable enough. That silly superstitions prevalent among older nations could be signs really of their former greatness, linked mightily close to natural forces, was a startling notion, but it paved the way in Hendricks' receptive mind

just then for the belief that certain so-called elements might be worshipped—known intimately, that is—to the uplifting advantage of the worshippers. And what elements more suitable for adoring imitation than wind and fire? For in a human body the first signs of what men term life are heat, which is combustion, and breath, which is a measure of wind. Life means fire, drawn first from the sun, and breathing, borrowed from the omnipresent air; there might credibly be ways of assaulting these elements and taking heaven by storm; of seizing from their inexhaustible stores an abnormal measure, of straining this huge raw supply into effective energy for human use—vitality. Living with fire and wind in their most active moments; closely imitating their movements, following in their footsteps, understanding their ‘laws of being,’ going *identically* with them—there lay a hint of the method. It was once, when men were primitively close to Nature, instinctual knowledge. The ceremony was the teaching. The Powers of fire, the Principalities of air, existed; and humanity *could* know their qualities by the ritual of imitation, could actually absorb the fierce enthusiasm of flame and the tireless energy of wind. Such transference was conceivable.

Leysin, at any rate, somehow made it so. His description of what he had personally witnessed, both in wilder lands and here in this little mountain range of middle Europe, had a reality in it that was upsetting to the last

degree. "There is nothing more difficult to believe," he said, "yet more certainly true, than the effect of these singular elemental rites." He laughed a short dry laugh. "The medieval superstition that a witch could raise a storm is but a remnant of a once completely efficacious system," he concluded, "though how that strange being, the Valais priest, rediscovered the process and introduced it here I have never been able to ascertain. That he did so results have proved. At any rate, it lets in life—life, moreover, in astonishing abundance; though whether for destruction or regeneration depends, obviously, upon the use the recipient puts it to. That's where direction comes in."

The beckoning impulse in the tutor's bewildered thoughts drew closer. The moment for communicating it had come at last. Without more ado he took the opening. He told his companion the incident in the village street, the boy's abrupt excitement, his new-found energy, the curious words he used, the independence and vitality of his attitude. He told also of his parentage; of his mother's disabilities, his craving for rushing air in abundance, his love of fire for its own sake; of his magnificent physical machinery, yet of his uselessness.

And Leysin, as he listened, seemed built on wires. Searching questions shot forth like blows into the other's mind. The Pasteur's sudden increase of enthusiasm was infectious. He leaped intuitively to the thing in Hendricks' thought. He understood the beckoning.

The tutor answered the questions as best he could, aware of the end in view with trepidation and a kind of mental breathlessness. Yes, unquestionably, Bindy *had* exchanged communication of some sort with the man, though his excitement had been evident even sooner.

"And you saw this man yourself?" Leysin pressed him.

"Indubitably—a tall and hurrying figure in the dusk."

"He brought energy with him? The boy felt it and responded?"

Hendricks nodded. "Became quite unmanageable for some minutes," he replied.

"He assimilated it though? There was no distress exactly?" Leysin asked sharply.

"None—that I could see. Pleasurable excitement, something aggressive, a rather wild enthusiasm. His will began to act. He used that curious phrase about wind and fire. He turned alive. He wanted to follow the man——"

"And the face—how would you describe it? Did it bring terror, I mean, or confidence?"

"Dark and splendid," answered the other as truthfully as he could. "In a certain sense rushing, tempestuous, yet stern rather."

"A face like the heights," suggested Leysin impatiently, "a windy, fiery aspect in it, eh?"

"The man swept past like the spirit of a storm in imaginative poetry——" began the tutor, hunting through his thoughts for adequate description, then stopped as he saw that his

companion had risen from his chair and begun to pace the floor.

The Pasteur paused a moment beside him, hands thrust deep into his pockets, head bent down and shoulders forward. For twenty seconds he stared into his visitor's face intently, as though he would force into him the thought in his own mind. His features seemed working visibly, yet behind a mask of strong control.

"Don't you see what it is? Don't you see?" he said in a lower, deeper tone. "*They knew*. Even from a distance they were aware of his coming. He is one of themselves." And he straightened up again. "He belongs to them."

"One of them? One of the wind and fire lot?" the tutor stammered.

The restless little man returned to his chair opposite, full of suppressed and vigorous movement, as though he were strung on springs.

"He's *of* them," he continued, "but in a peculiar and particular sense. More than merely a possible recruit, his empty organism would provide the very link they need, the perfect conduit." He watched his companion's face with careful keenness. "In the country where I first experienced this marvellous thing," he added significantly, "he would have been set apart as the offering, the sacrifice, as they call it there. The tribe would have chosen him with honour. He would have been the special bait to attract."

"Death?" whispered the other.

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But Leysin shook his head. "In the end, perhaps," he replied darkly, "for the vessel might be torn and shattered. But at first charged to the brim and crammed with energy—with transformed vitality they could draw into themselves through him. A monster, if you will, but to them a deity; and superhuman, in our little sense, most certainly."

Then Hendricks faltered inwardly and turned away. No words came to him at the moment. In silence the minds of the two men, one a religious, the other a secular teacher, and each with a burden of responsibility to the race, kept pace together without speech. The religious, however, outstripped the pedagogue. What he next said seemed a little disconnected with what had preceded it, although Hendricks caught the drift easily enough—and shuddered.

"An organism needing heat," observed Leysin calmly, "can absorb without danger what would destroy a normal person. Alcohol, again, neither injures nor intoxicates—up to a given point—the system that really requires it."

The tutor, perplexed and sorely tempted, felt that he drifted with a tide he found it difficult to stem.

"Up to a point," he repeated. "That's true, of course."

"Up to a given point," echoed the other, with significance that made his voice sound solemn. "Then rescue—in the nick of time."

He waited two full minutes and more for an answer; then, as none was audible, he said another

thing. His eyes were so intent upon the tutor's that the latter raised his own unwillingly, and understood thus all that lay behind the pregnant little sentence.

"With a number it would not be possible, but with an individual it could be done. Brim the empty vessel first. Then rescue—in the nick of time! Regeneration!"

IV

In the Englishman's mind there came a crash, as though something fell. There was dust, confusion, noise. Moral platitudes shouted at conventional admonitions. Warnings laughed and copy-book maxims shrivelled up. Above the lot, rising with a touch of grandeur, stood the pulpit figure of the little Pasteur, his big face shining clear through all the turmoil, strength and vision in the flaming eyes—a commanding outline with spiritual audacity in his heart. And Hendricks saw then that the man himself was standing erect in the centre of the room, one finger raised to command attention—listening. Some considerable interval must have passed while he struggled with his inner confusion.

Leysin stood, intently listening, his big head throwing a grotesque shadow on wall and ceiling.

"Hark!" he exclaimed, half whispering. "Do you hear that? Listen!"

A deep sound, confused and roaring, passed

across the night, far away, and slightly booming. It entered the little room so that the air seemed to tremble a moment. To Hendricks it held something ominous.

"The wind," he whispered, as the noise died off into the distance; "yet a moment ago the night was still enough. The stars were shining." There was tense excitement in the room just then. It showed in Leysin's face, which had gone white as a cloth. Hendricks himself felt extraordinarily stirred.

"Not wind, but human voices," the older man said quickly. "It's shouting. Listen!" and his eyes ran round the room, coming to rest finally in a corner where his hat and cloak hung from a nail. A gesture accompanied the look. He wanted to be out. The tutor half rose to take his leave. "You have duties to-night elsewhere," he stammered. "I'm forgetting." His own instinct was to get away himself with Bindy by the first early diligence. He was afraid of yielding.

"Hush!" whispered Leysin peremptorily. "Listen!"

He opened the window at the top, and through the crack, where the stars peeped brightly, there came, louder than before, the uproar of human voices floating through the night from far away. The air of the great pine forests came in with it. Hendricks listened intently a moment. He positively jumped to feel a hand upon his arm. Leysin's big head was thrust close up into his face.

"That's the commotion in the village," he whispered. "A messenger has come and gone; someone has gone back with him. To-night I shall be needed—down here; but to-morrow night when the great ritual takes place—up there——!"

Hendricks tried to push him away so as not to hear the words; but the little man seemed immovable as a rock. The impulse remained probably in the mind without making the muscles work. For the tutor, sorely tempted, longed to dare, yet faltered in his will.

"—if you felt like taking the risk," the words continued seductively, "we might place the empty vessel near enough to let it fill, then rescue it, charged with energy, in the nick of time." And the Pasteur's eyes were aglow with enthusiasm, his voice even trembling at the thought of high adventure to save another's soul.

"Watch merely," Hendricks heard his own voice whisper, hardly aware that he was saying it, "without taking part?" He said it thickly, stupidly, a man wavering and unsure of himself. "It would be an experience," he stammered. "I've never——"

"Merely watch, yes; look on; let him see," interrupted the other with eagerness. "We must be very careful. It's worth trying—a last resort."

They still stood close together. Hendricks felt the little man's breath on his face as he peered up at him.

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"I admit the chance," he began weakly.

"There is no chance," was the vigorous reply, "there is only Providence. You have been guided."

"But as to risk and failure, what of them? What's involved?" he asked, recklessness increasing in him.

"New wine in old bottles," was the answer. "But here, you tell me, the vessel is not damaged, but merely empty. The machinery is all right. If he merely watches, as from a little distance——"

"Yes, yes, the machinery *is* there, I agree. The boy has breeding, health, and all the physical qualities—good blood and nerves and muscles. It's only that life refuses to stay and drive them." His heart beat with violence even as he said it; he felt the energy and zeal from the older man pour into him. He was realizing in himself on a smaller scale what might take place with the boy in large. But still he shrank. Leysin for the moment said no more. His spiritual discernment was equal to his boldness. Having planted the seed, he left it to grow or die. The decision was not for him.

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In the light of the single lamp the two men sat facing each other, listening, waiting, while Leysin talked occasionally, but in the main kept silence. Some time passed, though how long the tutor could not say. In his mind was wild confusion. How could he justify such a mad

proposal? Yet how could he refuse the opening, preposterous though it seemed? The enticement was very great; temptation rushed upon him. Striving to recall his normal world, he found it difficult. The face of the old Marquess seemed a mere lifeless picture on a wall—it watched but could not interfere. Here was an opportunity to take or leave. He fought the battle in terms of naked souls, while the ordinary four-cornered morality hid its face awhile. He heard himself explaining, delaying, hedging, half toying with the problem. But the redemption of a soul was at stake, and he tried to forget the environment and conditions of modern thought and belief. Sentences flashed at him out of the battle: “I must take him back worse than when I started, or—what? A violent being like Marston, or a redeemed, converted system with new energy? It’s a chance, and my last.” Moreover, odd, half-comic detail—there was the support of the Church, of a Protestant clergyman whose fundamental beliefs were similar to the evangelical persuasions of the boy’s family. Conversion, as demoniacal possession, were both traditions of the blood. After all, the old Marquess might understand and approve. “You took the opening God set in your way in His wisdom. You showed faith and courage. Far be it from me to condemn you.” The picture on the wall looked down at him and spoke the words.

The wild hypothesis of the intrepid little missionary-pasteur swept him with an effect like

hypnotism. Then, suddenly, something in him seemed to decide finally for itself. He flung himself, morality and all, upon this vigorous other personality. He leaned across the table, his face close to the lamp. His voice shook as he spoke.

"Would *you*?" he asked—then knew the question foolish, and that such a man would shrink from nothing where the redemption of a soul was at stake; knew also that the question was proof that his own decision was already made.

There was something grotesque almost in the torrent of colloquial French Leysin proceeded to pour forth, while the other sat listening in amazement, half ashamed and half exhilarated. He looked at the stalwart figure, the wiry bowed legs, as he paced the floor, the shortness of the coat-sleeves and the absence of shirt-cuffs round the powerful lean wrists. It was a great fighting man he watched, a man afraid of nothing in heaven or on earth, prepared to lead a forlorn hope into a hostile unknown land. And the sight, combined with what he heard, set the seal upon his half-hearted decision. He would take the risk and go.

"*Pfui!*" exclaimed the little Pasteur as though it might have been an oath, his loud whisper breaking through into a guttural sound, "*pfui!* Bah! Would that *my* people had machinery like that so that I could use it! I've no material to work on, no force to direct, nothing but heavy, sodden clay. Jelly!" he cried, "nega-

tive, useless, lukewarm stuff at best." He lowered his voice suddenly, so as to listen at the same time. "I might as well be a baker kneading dough," he continued. "They drink and yield and drink again; they never attack and drive; they're not worth labouring to save." He struck the wooden table with his fist, making the lamp rattle, while his listener started and drew back. "What good can weak souls, though spotless, be to God? The best have long ago gone up to them," and he jerked his leonine old head toward the mountains. "Where there's *life* there's hope," he stamped his foot as he said it, "but the lukewarm—*pfui!*—I will spew them out of my mouth!"

He paused by the window a moment, listened attentively, then resumed his pacing to and fro. Clearly, he longed for action. Indifference, half-heartedness, had no place in his composition. And Hendricks felt his own slower blood take fire as he listened.

"Ah!" cried Leysin louder, "what a battle I could fight up there for God, could I but live among them, stem the flow of their dark strong vitality, then twist it round and up, up, up!" And he jerked his finger skyward. "It's the great sinners we want, not the meek-faced saints. There's energy enough among those devils to bring a whole canton to the great Footstool, could I but direct it." He paused a moment, standing over his astonished visitor. "Bring the boy up with you, and let him drink his fill. And pray—pray, I say—that he become

a violent sinner first in order that later there shall be something worth offering to God. Over one *sinner* that repenteth——”

A rapid, nervous knocking interrupted the flow of words, and the figure of a woman stood upon the threshold. With the opening of the door came also again the roaring from the night outside. Hendricks saw the tall, somewhat dishevelled outline of the wife—he remembered her vaguely, though she could hardly see him now in his darker corner—and recalled the fact that she had been sent out to Leysin in his missionary days, a worthy, illiterate, but adoring woman. She wore a shawl, her hair was untidy, her eyes fixed and staring. Her husband's sturdy little figure, as he rose, stood level with her chin.

“You hear it, Jules?” she whispered thickly. “The *joran* has brought them down. You'll be needed in the village.” She said it anxiously, though Hendricks understood the *patois* with difficulty. They talked excitedly together a moment in the doorway, their outlines blocked against the corridor where a single oil-lamp flickered. She warned, urging something; he expostulated. Fragments reached Hendricks in his corner. Clearly the woman worshipped her husband like a king, yet feared for his safety. He, for his part, comforted her, scolded a little, argued, told her to “believe in God and go back to bed.”

“They'll take you too, and you'll never return. It's not your parish anyhow . . .” a touch of anguish in her tone.

But Leysin was impatient to be off. He led her down the passage. "My parish is wherever I can help. I belong to God. Nothing can harm me but to leave undone the work He gives me." The steps went farther away as he guided her to the stairs. Outside the roar of voices rose and fell. Wind brought the drifting sound, wind carried it away. It was like the thunder of the sea.

And the Englishman, using the little scene as a flashlight upon his own attitude, saw it for an instant as God might have seen it. Leysin's point of view was high, scanning a very wide horizon. His eye being single, the whole body was full of light. The risk, it suddenly seemed, was—nothing; to shirk it, indeed, the merest cowardice.

He went up and seized the Pasteur's hand.

"To-morrow," he said, a trifle shakily perhaps, yet looking straight into his eyes. "If we stay over—I'll bring the lad with me—provided he comes willingly."

"You will stay over," interrupted the other with decision. "Come to supper at seven. Come in mountain boots. Use persuasion, but not force. He shall see it from a distance—without taking part."

"From a distance—yes," the tutor repeated, "but without taking part."

"I know the signs," the Pasteur broke in significantly. "We can rescue him in the nick of time—charged with energy and life, yet before the danger gets——"

A sudden clangour of bells drowned the whispering voice, cutting the sentence in the middle. It was like an alarm of fire. Leysin sprang sharply round.

"The signal!" he cried; "the signal from the church. Someone's been taken. I must go at once—I shall be needed." He had his hat and cloak on in a moment, was through the passage and into the street, Hendricks following at his heels.

The whole place seemed alive. Yet the road-way was deserted, and no lights showed at the windows of the houses. Only from the farther end of the village, where stood the cabaret, came a roar of voices, shouting, crying, singing. The impression was that the population was centred there. Far in the starry sky a line of fires blazed upon the heights, throwing a lurid reflection above the deep black valley. Excitement filled the night.

"But how extraordinary!" exclaimed Hendricks, hurrying to overtake his alert companion; "what life there is about! Everything's on the rush." They went faster, almost running. "I feel the waves of it beating even here." He followed breathlessly.

"A messenger has come—and gone," replied Leysin in a sharp, decided voice. "What you feel here is but the overflow. This is the aftermath. I must work down here with my people——"

"I'll work with you," began the other. But Leysin stopped him.

“Keep yourself for to-morrow night—up there,” he said with grave authority, pointing to the fiery line upon the heights, and at the same time quickening his pace along the street. “At the moment,” he cried, looking back, “your place is yonder.” He jerked his head toward the carpenter’s house among the vineyards. The next minute he was gone.

V

And Hendricks, accredited tutor to a sprig of nobility in the twentieth century, asked himself suddenly how such things could possibly be. The adventure took on abruptly a touch of nightmare. Only the light in the sky above the cabaret windows, and the roar of voices where men drank and sang, brought home the reality of it all. With a shudder of apprehension he glanced at the lurid glare upon the mountains. He was committed now; not because he had merely promised, but because he had definitely made up his mind.

Lighting a match, he saw by his watch that the visit had lasted over two hours. It was after eleven. He hurried, letting himself in with the big house-key, and going on tiptoe up the granite stairs. In his mind rose a picture of the boy as he had known him all these weary, sight-seeing months—the mild brown eyes, the facile indolence, the pliant, watery emotions of the listless creature; but behind him now, like storm-clouds, the hopes, desires, fears, the

Pasteur's talk had conjured up. The yearning to save stirred strongly in his heart, and more and more of the little man's reckless spiritual audacity came with it. His own affection for the lad was genuine, but impatience and adventure pushed eagerly through the tenderness. If only, oh, if only he could put life into that great six-foot, big-boned frame! Some energy as of fire and wind into that inert machinery of mind and body! The idea was utterly incredible, but surely no harm could come of trying the experiment. There *were* the huge and elemental forces, of course, in Nature, and if . . . A sound in the bedroom, as he crept softly past the door, caught his attention, and he paused a moment to listen. Lord Ernie was not asleep, then, after all. He wondered why the sound got somehow at his heart. There was shuffling behind the door; there was a voice, too—or was it voices? He knocked.

"Who is it?" came at once, in a tone he hardly recognized. And as he answered, "It's I, Mr Hendricks; let me in," there followed a renewal of the shuffling, but without the sound of voices, and the door flew open—it was not even locked. Lord Ernie stood before him, dressed to go out. In the faint starlight the tall, ungainly figure filled the doorway, erect and huge, the shoulders squared, the trunk no longer drooping. The listlessness was gone. He stood upright, limbs straight and alert; the sagging limp had vanished from the knees. He looked, in this semi-darkness, like another person, almost

monstrous. And the tutor drew back instinctively, catching an instant at his breath.

"But, my dear boy! Why aren't you asleep?" he stammered. He glanced half nervously about him. "I heard you talking, surely?" He fumbled for a match; but before he found it the other had turned on the electric switch. The light flared out. There was no one else in the room. "Is anything wrong with you? What's the matter?"

But the boy answered quietly, though in a deeper voice than Hendricks had ever known in him before:

"I'm all right; only I couldn't sleep. I've been watching those fires on the mountains. I—I wanted to go out and see."

He still held the field-glasses in his hand, swinging them vigorously by the strap. The room was littered with clothes, just unpacked, the heavy shooting-boots in the middle of the floor; and Hendricks, noticing these signs, felt a wave of excitement sweep through him, caught somehow from the presence of the boy. There was a sense of vitality in the room—as though a rush of active movement had just passed through it. Both windows stood wide open, and the roar of voices was clearly audible. Lord Ernie turned his head to listen.

"That's only the village people drinking and shouting," said Hendricks, closely watching each movement that he made. "It's perfectly natural, Bindy, that you feel too excited to sleep. We're in the mountains. The air stimulates

tremendously—it makes the heart beat faster.” He decided not to press the lad with questions.

“But I never felt like this in the Rockies or the Himalayas,” came the swift rejoinder, as he moved to the window and looked out. “There was nothing in India or Japan like *that*!” He swept his hand toward the wooded heights that towered above the village so close. He talked volubly. “All those things we saw out there were sham—done on purpose for tourists. Up there it’s real. I’ve been watching through the glasses till—I felt I simply must go out and join it. You can see men dancing round the fires, and big rushing women. Oh, Mr Hendricks, isn’t it all glorious—all too glorious and ripping for words!” And his brown eyes shone like lamps.

“You mean that it’s spontaneous, natural?” the other guided him, welcoming the new enthusiasm, yet still bewildered by the startling change. It was not mere nerves, he saw. There was nothing morbid in it.

“They’re doing it, I mean, because they have to,” came the decided answer, “and because they feel it. They’re not just copying the world.” He put his hand upon the other’s arm. There was dry heat in it that Hendricks felt even through his clothes. “And that’s what I want,” the boy went on, raising his voice; “what I’ve always wanted without knowing it—real things that can make me alive. I’ve often had it in my dreams, you know, but now I’ve found it.”

"But I didn't know. You never told me of those dreams."

The boy's cheeks flushed, so that the colour and the fire in his eyes made him positively splendid. He answered slowly, as out of some part he had hitherto kept deliberately concealed.

"Because I never could get hold of it in words. It sounded so silly even to myself, and I thought Father would train it all away and laugh at it. It's awfully far down in me, but it's so real I knew it must come out one day, and that I should find it. Oh, I say, Mr Hendricks," and he lowered his voice, leaning out across the window-sill suddenly, "*that* fills me up and feeds me"—he pointed to the heights—"and gives me life. The life I've seen till now was only a kind of show. It starved me. I want to go up there and feel it pouring through my blood." He filled his lungs with the strong mountain air, and paused while he exhaled it slowly, as though tasting it with delight and understanding. Then he burst out again, "I vote we go. Will you come with me? What d'you say. Eh?"

They stared at each other hard a moment. Something as primitive and irresistible as love passed through the air between them. With a great effort the older man kept the balance true.

"Not to-night, not now," he said firmly. "It's too late. To-morrow, if you like—with pleasure."

"But to-morrow *night*," cried the boy with a rush, "when the fires are blazing and the wind is loose. Not in the stupid daylight."

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"All right. To-morrow night. And my old friend, Monsieur Leysin, shall be our guide. He knows the way, and he knows the people too."

Lord Ernie seized his hands with enthusiasm. His vigour was so disconcerting that it seemed to affect his physical appearance. The body grew almost visibly; his very clothes hung on him differently; he was no longer a nonentity yawning beneath an ancient pedigree and title; he was an aggressive personality. The boy in him rushed into manhood, as it were, while still retaining boyish speech and gesture. It was uncanny. "We'll go more than once, I vote; go again and again. This *is* a place and a half. It's *my* place with a vengeance——!"

"Not exactly the kind of place your father would wish you to linger in," his tutor interrupted. "But we might stay a day or two—especially as you like it so."

"It's far better than the towns and the rotten embassies; better than fifty Simlas and Bombays and filthy Cairos," cried the other eagerly. "It's just the thing I need, and when I get home I'll show 'em something. I'll prove it. Why, they simply won't know me!" He laughed, and his face shone with a kind of vivid radiance in the glare of the electric light. The transformation was more than curious. Waiting a moment to see if more would follow, Hendricks moved slowly then toward the door, with the remark that it was advisable now to go to bed since they would be up late the following night, when he

noticed for the first time that the pillow and sheets were crumpled and that the bed had already been lain in. The first suspicion flashed back upon him with new certainty.

Lord Ernie was already taking off his heavy coat, preparatory to undressing. He looked up quickly at the altered tone of voice.

"Bindy," the tutor said with a touch of gravity, "you *were* alone just now—weren't you—of course?"

The other sat up from stooping over his boots. With his hands resting on the bed behind him, he looked straight into his companion's eyes. Lying was not among his faults. He answered slowly after a decided interval.

"I—I was asleep," he whispered, evidently trying to be accurate, yet hesitating how to describe the thing he had to say, "and had a dream—one of my real, vivid dreams when something happens. Only this time it was more real than ever before. It was"—he paused, searching for words, then added—"sweet and awful."

And Hendricks repeated the surprising sentence. "Sweet and awful, Bindy! What in the world do you mean, boy?"

Lord Ernie seemed puzzled himself by the choice of words he used.

"I don't know exactly," he went on honestly, "only I mean that it was awfully real and splendid, a bit of my own life somewhere—somewhere else—where it lies hidden away

behind a lot of days and months that choke it up. I can never get at it except in woods and places, quite alone, hearing the wind or making fires, or—in sleep.” He hid his face in his hands a moment, then looked up with a hint of censure in his eyes. “Why didn’t you tell me that such things *were* done? You never told me,” he repeated.

“I didn’t know it myself until this evening. Leysin——”

“I thought you knew everything,” Lord Ernie broke in in that same half-chiding tone.

“Monsieur Leysin told me to-night for the first time,” said Hendricks firmly, “that such people and such practices existed. Till now I had never dreamed that such superstitions survived anywhere in the world at all.” He resented the reproach. But he was also aware that the boy resented his authority. For the first time his ascendancy seemed in question; his voice, his eye, his manner, did not quell as formerly. “So you mean, when you say ‘sweet and awful,’ that it was very real to you?” he asked. He insisted now with purpose. “Is that it, Bindy?”

The other replied eagerly enough. “Yes, that’s it, I think—partly. This time it was more than dreaming. It was real. I got there. I remembered. That’s what I meant. And after I woke up the thing still went on. The man seemed still in the room beside the bed, calling me to get up and go with him——”

“Man! What man?” The tutor leant upon

the back of a chair to steady himself. The wind just then went past the open windows with a singing rush.

"The dark man who passed us in the village, and who pointed to the fires on the heights. He came with the wind, you remember. He pulled my coat."

The boy stood up as he said it. He came across the naked boarding, his step light and dancing. "Fire that heats but does not burn, and wind that blows the heart alight, or something—I forget now exactly. *You* heard it too." He whispered the words with excitement, raising his arms and knees as in the opening movements of a dance.

Hendricks kept his own excitement down, but with a distinctly conscious effort.

"I heard nothing of the kind," he said calmly. "I was only thinking of getting home dry. You say," he asked with decision, "that you *heard* those words?"

Lord Ernie stood back a little. It was not that he wished to conceal, but that he felt uncertain how to express himself. "In the street," he said, "I heard nothing; the words rose up in my own head, as it were. But in the dream, and afterwards too, when I was wide awake, I heard them out loud, clearly: Fire that heats but does not burn, and wind that blows the heart to flame—that's how it was."

"In French, Bindy? You heard it in French?"

"Oh, it was no language at all. The eyes said it—both times." He spoke as naturally

as though it was the Durbah he described again. Only this new aggressive certainty was in his voice and manner. "Mr Hendricks," he went on eagerly, "*you* understand what I mean, don't you? When certain people look at one words start up in the mind as though one heard them spoken. I heard the words in my head, I suppose; only they seemed so familiar, as though I'd known them before—always——"

"Of course, Bindy, I understand. But this man—tell me—did he stay on after you woke up? And how did he go?" He looked round at the barely furnished room for hiding-places. "It was really the dream you carried on after waking, wasn't it?"

Then Bindy laughed, but inwardly, as to himself. There was the faintest possible hint of derision in his voice. "No doubt," he said; "only it was one of my big, real dreams. And how he went I can't explain at all, for I didn't see. You knocked at the door; I turned, and found myself standing in the room, dressed to go out. There was a rush of wind outside the window—and when I looked he was no longer there. The same minute you came in. It was all as quick as that. I suppose I dressed—in my sleep."

They stood for several minutes, staring at each other without speaking. The tutor hesitated between several courses of action, unable, for the life of him, to decide upon any particular one. His instinct on the whole was to stop nothing, but to encourage all possible

expression, while keeping rigorous watch and guard. Repression, it seemed to him just then, was the least desirable line to take. Somewhere there was truth in the affair. He felt out of his depth, his authority impaired, and under these temporary disadvantages he might so easily make a grave mistake, injuring instead of helping. While Lord Ernie finished his undressing he leaned out of the window, taking great draughts of the keen night air, watching the blazing fires and listening to the roar of voices, now dying down into the distance.

And the voice of his thinking whispered to him, "Let it all come out. Repress nothing. Let him have the entire adventure. If it's nonsense it can't injure, and if it's true it's inevitable." He drew his head in and moved toward the door. "Then it's settled," he said quietly, as though nothing unusual had happened; "we'll go up there to-morrow night—with Monsieur Leysin to show us the way. And you'll go to sleep now, won't you? For to-morrow we may be up very late. Promise me, Bindy."

"I'm dead tired," came the answer from the sheets. "I certainly shan't dream any more, if that's what you mean. I promise."

Hendricks turned the light out and went softly from the room. He could always trust the boy.

"Good night, Bindy," he said.

"Good night," came the drowsy reply.

Upstairs he lingered a long time over his own

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undressing, listening, waiting, watching for the least sound below. But nothing happened. Once, for his own peace of mind, he stole stealthily downstairs to the boy's door; then, reassured by the heavy breathing that was distinctly audible, he went up finally and got into bed himself. The night was very still now. It was cool, and the stars were brilliant over lake and forest and mountain. No voices broke the silence. He only heard the tinkle of the little streams beyond the vineyards. And by midnight he was sound asleep.

VI

And next day broke as soft and brilliant as though October had stolen it from June; the Alps gleamed through an almost summery haze across the lake; the air held no hint of coming winter; and the Jura mountains wore the true blue of memory in Hendricks' mind. Patches of red and yellow splashed the great pine-woods here and there where beech and ash put autumn in the vast dark carpet.

The tutor woke clear-headed and refreshed. All that had happened the night before seemed out of proportion and unreasonable. There had been exaggerated emotion in it: in himself because he returned to a place still charged with potent memories of youth; and in Lord Ernie because the lad was overwrought by the electrical disturbance of the atmosphere. The nearness of the ancestral halls, which they both disliked,

had emphasized it; the ominous, wild weather had favoured it; and the coincidence of these pagan rites of superstitious peasants had focused it all into a melodramatic form with an added touch of the supernatural that was highly picturesque and—dangerously suggestive. Hendricks recovered his common sense; judgment asserted itself again.

Yet, for all that, certain things remained authentic. The effect upon the boy was not illusion, nor his words about fire and wind mere meaningless invention. There hid some undivined and significant correspondence between the gaps in his deficient nature and these two turbulent elements. The talk with Leysin, as the conduct of his wife, remained authentic; those facts were too steady to be dismissed, the Pasteur too genuinely in earnest to be catalogued in dream. Neither daylight nor common sense could dissipate their actuality. Truth lay somewhere in it all.

Thus the day, for the tutor, was a battle that shifted with varying fortune between doubt and certainty. In the morning his mind was decided: the wild experiment was unjustifiable; in the afternoon, as the sunshine grew faint and melancholy, it became "interesting, for what harm could come of it?" but toward evening, when shadows lengthened across the purple forests and the trees stood motionless in the calm and windless air, the adventure seemed, as it had seemed the night before, not only justifiable, but right and necessary. It only became

evitable, however, when, after tea together on the balcony, Lord Ernie, mentioning the subject for the first time that day, asked pointedly what time the Pasteur expected them to supper; then, noticing the flash of hesitancy in his companion's eyes, added in his strange deep voice, "You promised we should go." Withdrawal after that was out of the question. To retract would have meant, for one thing, final loss of the boy's confidence—a possibility not to be contemplated for an instant.

Until this moment no word of the preceding night had passed the lips of either. Lord Ernie had been quiet and preoccupied, silent rather, but never listless. He was peaceful, perhaps subdued a little, yet with a suppressed energy in his bearing that Hendricks watched with secret satisfaction. The tutor, closely observant, detected nothing out of gear; life stirred strongly in him; there was purpose, interest, will; there was desire; but there was nothing to cause alarm.

Availing himself then of the lad's absorption in his own affairs, he wandered forth alone upon his sentimental tour of inspection. No ghost of emotion rose to stalk beside him. That early tragedy, he now saw clearly, had been no more than youthful explosion of mere physical passion, wholesome and natural, but due chiefly to propinquity. His thoughts ran idly on; and he was even congratulating himself upon escape and freedom when, abruptly, he remembered a phrase Bindy had used the night before, and

stumbled suddenly upon a clue when least expecting it.

He came to a sudden halt. The significance of it crashed through his mind and startled him. "There are big rushing women. . . ." It was the first reference to the other sex, as evidence of their attraction for him, Hendricks had ever known to pass his lips. Hitherto, though twenty years of age, the lad had never spoken of women as though he was aware of their terrible magic. He had not discovered them as females, necessary to every healthy male. It was not purity, of course, but ignorance: he had felt nothing. Something had now awakened sex in him, so that he knew himself a man, and naked. And it had revolutionized the world for him. This new life came from the roots, transforming listless indifference into positive desire; the will woke out of sleep, and all the currents of his system took aggressive form. For all energy, intellectual, emotional, or spiritual, is fundamentally one: it is primarily sexual.

Hendricks paused in his sentimental walk, marvelling that he had not realized sooner this simple truth. It brought a certain logical meaning even into the pagan rites upon the mountains, these ancient rites which symbolized the marriage of the two tremendous elements of wind and fire, heat and air. And the lad's quiet, busy mood that morning confirmed his simple discovery. It involved restraint and purpose. Lord Ernie was alive. Hendricks

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would take home with him to those ancestral halls a vessel bursting with energy—creative energy. It was admirable that he should witness—from a safe distance—this primitive ceremony of crude pagan origin. It was the very thing. And the tutor hurried back to the house among the vineyards, aware that his responsibility had increased, but persuaded more than ever that his course was justified.

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The sky held calm and cloudless through the day, the forests brooding beneath the hazy autumn sunshine. Indications that the second hurricane lay brewing among the heights were not wanting, however, to experienced eyes. Almost a preternatural silence reigned; there was a warm heaviness in the placid atmosphere; the surface of the lake was patched and streaky; the extreme clarity of the air an ominous omen. Distant objects were too close. Toward sunset, moreover, the streaks and patches vanished as though sucked below, while thin strips of tenuous cloud appeared from nowhere above the northern cliffs. They moved with great rapidity at an enormous height, touched with a lurid brilliance as the sun sank out of sight; and when Hendricks strolled over with Lord Ernie to *la cure* for supper there came a sudden rush of heated wind that set the branches sharply rattling, then died away as abruptly as it rose.

They seemed reflected, too, these disturbances, in the human atmospheres about the supper-

table—there was suppression of various emotions, emotions presaging violence. Lord Ernie was exhilarated, Hendricks uneasy and preoccupied, the Pasteur grave and thoughtful. In Hendricks was another feeling as well—that he had lightly summoned a storm which might carry him off his feet. The boy's excitement increased it, as wind-puffs fan a starting fire. His own judgment had somewhere played him false, betraying him into this incredible adventure. And yet he could not stop it. The Pasteur's influence was over him perhaps. He was ashamed to turn back. He was committed. The unusual circumstances found the weakness in his character.

For somewhere in the preposterous superstition there lay a big forgotten truth. He could not believe it, and yet he did believe it. The world had forgotten how to live truly close to Nature.

A desultory conversation was carried on, chiefly between the two men, while the boy ate hungrily, and Mme Leysin watched her husband with anxiety as she served the simple meal.

“So you are coming with us, and you like to come?” the Pasteur observed quietly, Hendricks translating.

Lord Ernie replied with a gesture of unmistakable enthusiasm.

“A wild lot of men and women,” Leysin went on, keeping his eye hard upon him, “with an interesting worship of their own copied from very ancient times. They live on the heights,
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and mix little with us valley folk. You shall see their ceremonies to-night."

"They get the wind and fire into themselves, don't they?" asked the boy keenly, and somewhat to the distress of the translator, who rendered it, "They get into wind and fire."

"They worship wind and fire," Leysin replied, "and they do it by means of a wonderful dance that somehow imitates the leap of flame and the headlong rush of wind. If you copy the movements and gestures of a person you discover the emotion that causes them. You share it. Their idea is, apparently, that by imitating the movements they invite or attract the force—draw these elemental powers into their systems, so that in the end——"

He stopped suddenly, catching the tutor's eye. Lord Ernie seemed to understand without translation; he had laid down his knife and fork and was leaning forward across the table, listening with deep absorption. His expression was alert with a new intelligence that was almost cunning. An acute sensibility seemed to have awakened in him.

"As with laughing, I suppose?" he said in an undertone to Hendricks quickly. "If you imitate a laugher, you laugh yourself in the end and feel all the jolly excitement of laughter. Is that what he means?"

The tutor nodded with assumed indifference. "Imitation is always infectious," he said lightly; "but, of course, you will not imitate these wild people yourself, Bindy. We'll just look on from a distance."

"From a distance!" repeated the boy, obviously disappointed. "What's the good of that?" A look of obstinacy passed across his altered face.

Hendricks met his eyes squarely. "At a circus," he said firmly, "you just watch. You don't imitate the clown, do you?"

"If you look on long enough, you do," was the rather dogged reply.

"Well, take the Russian dancers we saw in Moscow," the other insisted patiently; "you felt the power and beauty without jumping up and whirling in your stall?"

Bindy half glared at him. There was almost contempt in his quiet answer: "But your mind whirled with them. And later your body would too; otherwise it's given you nothing." He paused a second. "I can only get the fun of riding by being on a horse's back and doing his movements exactly with him—not by watching him."

Hendricks smiled and shrugged his shoulders. He did not wish to discourage the enthusiasm lying behind this analysis. The uneasiness in him grew apace. He said something rapidly in French, using an undertone and laughter to confuse the actual words.

"Of course we must not interfere with their ceremonies," put in the Pasteur with decision. "It's sacred to them. We can hide among the trees and watch. You would not leave your seat in church to imitate the priest, would you?" He glanced smilingly at the eager youth before him.

"If he did something real I would." It was said with a bright flash in the eyes. "Anything real I'd copy like a shot. Only, I never find it."

The reply was disconcerting rather: and Hendricks, as he hurriedly translated, made a clatter with his knife and fork, for something in him rose to meet the truth behind the curious words. From that moment, as though catching a little of the boy's exhilaration, he passed under a kind of spell perhaps. It was, in spite of the exaggeration, oddly stimulating. This dull little meal at the village *cure* masked an accumulating vehemence, eager to break loose. He heard the old father's voice: "Well done, Hendricks! You have accomplished wonders!" He would take back the boy—alive. . . .

Yet all the time there were streaks and patches on his soul as upon the surface of the lake that afternoon. There were signs of terror. He felt himself letting go, an increasing recklessness, a yielding up more and more of his own authority to that of this triumphant boy. Bindy understood the meaning of it all and felt secure; Hendricks faltered, hesitated, stood on the defensive. Yet ever less and less. Already he accepted the other's guidance. Already Lord Ernie's leadership was in the ascendant. Conviction invariably holds dominion over doubt.

They ate little. It was near the end of the meal when the wind, falling from a clear and starlit sky, struck its first violent blow, dropping with the force of an explosion that shook the

wooden house, and passing with a roar toward the distant lake. The oil-lamp, suspended from the ceiling, trembled; the Pasteur looked apprehensively at the shuttered windows; and Lord Ernie, with startling abruptness, stood up. His eyes were shining. His voice was brisk, alert, and deep.

"The wind, the wind!" he cried. "Think what it'll be up there! We shall feel it on our bodies!" His enthusiasm was like a rush of air across the table. "And the fire!" he went on. "The flames will lick all over, and tear about the sky. I feel wild and full of them already! How splendid!" And the flame of the little lamp leaped higher in the chimney as he said it.

"The violence of the *coup de joran* is extraordinary," explained Leysin as he got up to turn down the wick, "and the second outburst——" The rest of his sentence was drowned by the noise of Hendricks' voice telling the boy to sit down and finish his supper. And at the same moment the Pasteur's wife came in as though a stroke of wind drove behind her down the passage. The door slammed in the draught. There was a momentary confusion in the room, above which her voice rose shrill and frightened.

"The fires are alight, Jules," she whispered in her half-intelligible *patois*, "the forest is burning all along the upper ridge." Her face was pale and her speech came stumbling. She lowered her lips to her husband's ear. "They'll be looking out for recruits to-night. Is it neces-

sary, is it right for you to go?" She glanced uneasily at the English visitors. "You know the danger——"

He stopped her with a gesture. "Those who look on at life accomplish nothing," he answered impatiently. "One must act, always act. Chances are sent to be taken, not stared at." He rose, pushing past her into the passage, and as he did so she gave him one swift comprehensive look of tenderness and admiration, then hurried after him to find his hat and cloak. Willingly she would have kept him at home that night, yet gladly, in another sense, she saw him go. She fumbled in her movements, ready to laugh or cry or pray. Hendricks saw her pain and understood. It was singular how the woman's attitude intensified his own misgivings; her behaviour, the mere expression of her face alone, made the adventure so absolutely real.

Three minutes later they were in the village street. Hendricks and Lord Ernie, the latter impatient in the road beyond, saw her tall figure stoop to embrace him. "I shall pray all night: I shall watch from my window for your return. God, who speaks from the whirlwind, and whose pathway is the fire, will go with you. Remember the younger men; it is ever the younger men that they seek to take . . . !" Her words were half hysterical. The kiss was given and taken; the open doorway framed her outline a moment; then the buttress of the church blotted her out, and they were off.

VII

At once the curious confusion of strong wind was upon them. Gusts howled about the corners of the shuttered houses and tore noisily across the open yards. Dust whirled with the rapidity as of some spectral white machinery. A tile came clattering down about their feet, while overhead the roofs had an air of shifting, toppling, bending. The entire village seemed scooped up and shaken, then dropped upon the earth again in tottering fashion.

"This way," gasped the little Pasteur, blown sideways like a sail; "follow me closely." Almost arm-in-arm at first they hurried down the deserted street, past lampless windows and tight-fastened doors, and soon were beyond the cabaret in that open stretch between the village and the forest where the wind had unobstructed way. Far above them ran the fiery mountain ridge. They saw the glare reflected in the sky as the tempest first swept them all three together, then separated them in the same moment. They seemed to spin or whirl. "It's far worse than I expected," shouted their guide; "here! Give me your hand!" then found, once disentangled from his flapping cloak, that no one stood beside him. For each of them it was a single fight to reach the shelter of the woods, where the actual ascent began. An instant the Pasteur seemed to hesitate. He glanced back at the lighted window of *la cure* across the fields, at the line of fire in the sky, at the figure dis-

appearing in the blackness immediately ahead. "Where's the boy?" he shouted. "Don't let him get too far in front. Keep close. Wait till I come!" They staggered back against each other. "Look how easily he's slipped ahead already!"

"This howling wind——" Hendricks shouted, as they advanced side by side, pushing their shoulders against the storm.

The rest of the sentence vanished into space. Leysin shoved him forward, pointing to where, some twenty yards in front, the figure of Lord Ernie, head down, was battling eagerly with the hurricane. Already he stood near to the shelter of the trees, waving his arms with energy toward the summits where the fires blazed. He was calling something at the top of his voice, urging them to hurry. His voice rushed down upon them with a pelt of wind.

"Don't let him get away from us," bawled Leysin, holding his hands cup-wise to his mouth. "Keep him in reach. He may see, but must not take part. . . ." A blow full in the face that smote him like the flat of a great sword clapped the sentence short. "That's *your* part. He won't obey me!" Hendricks heard it as they plunged across the windswept reach, panting, struggling, forcing their bodies sideways like two-legged crabs against the terrific force of the descending *joran*. They reached the protection of the forest wall without further attempt at speech. Here there was sudden peace and silence, for the tall, dense trees received the

tempest's impact like a cushion, stopping it. They paused a moment to recover breath.

But although the first exhaustion speedily passed, that original confusion of strong wind remained—in Hendricks' mind, at least—for wind violent enough to be battled with has a scattering effect on thought and blows the very blood about. Something in him snapped its cables and blew out to sea. His breath drew in an impetuous quality from the tempest each time he filled his lungs. There was agitation in him that caused an odd exaggeration of the emotions. The boy, as they came up, leaped down from a boulder he had climbed. He opened his arms, making of his cloak a kind of sail that filled and flapped.

"At last!" he cried, impatient, almost vexed. "I thought you were never coming. The wind blew me along. We shall be late——"

The tutor caught his arm with vigour. "You keep by us, Ernest; d'you hear now? No rushing ahead like that. Leysin's the guide, not you." He even shook him. But as he did so he was aware that he himself resisted something that he did not really want to resist, something that urged him forcibly; a little more and he would yield to it with pleasure, with abandon, finally with recklessness. A reaction of panic fear ran over him.

"It was the wind, I tell you," cried the boy, flinging himself free with a hint of insolence in his voice, "for it's alive. I mean to see everything. The wind's our leader and the fire's our

guide." He made a movement to start on again.

"You'll obey me," thundered Hendricks, "or else you'll go home. D'you understand?"

With exasperation, yet with uneasy delight, he noted the words Bindy made use of. It was in him that he might almost have uttered them himself. He stepped already into an entirely new world. Exhilaration caught him even now. Putting the brake on was mere pretence. He seized the lad by both shoulders and pushed him to the rear, then placed himself next, so that Leysin moved in front and led the way. The procession started, diving into the comparative shelter of the forest. "Don't let him pass you," he heard in rapid French; "guide him, that's all. The power's already in his blood. Keep yourself in hand as well, and follow me closely." The roar of the storm above them carried the words clean off the world.

Here in the forest they moved, it seemed, along the floor of an ocean whose surface raged with dreadful violence; any moment one or other of them might be caught up to that surface and whirled off to destruction. For the procession was not one with itself. The darkness, the difficulty of hearing what each said, the feeling, too, that each climbed for himself, made everything seem at sixes and sevens. And the tutor, this secret exultation growing in his heart, denied the anxiety that kept it pace, and battled with his turbulent emotions, a divided

personality. His power over the boy, he realized, had gravely weakened. A little time ago they had seemed somehow equal. Now, however, a complete reversal of their relative positions had taken place. The boy was sure of himself. While Leysin led at a steady mountaineer's pace on his wiry, short, bowed legs, Hendricks, a yard or two behind him, stumbled a good deal in the darkness, Lord Ernie for ever on his heels, eager to push past. But Bindy never stumbled. There was no flagging in his muscles. He moved so lightly and with so sure a tread that he almost seemed to dance, and often he stepped aside to leap a boulder or to run along a fallen trunk. Path there was none. Occasional gusts of wind rushed gustily down into these depths of forest where they moved, and now, from time to time, as they rose nearer to the line of fire on the ridge, an increasing glare lit up the knuckled roots or glimmered on the bramble thickets and heavy beds of moss. It was astonishing how the little Pasteur never missed his way. Periods of thick silence alternated with moments when the storm swept down through gullies among the trees, reverberating like thunder in the hollows.

Slowly they advanced, buffeted, driven, pushed, the wildness of some Walpurgis night growing upon all three. In the tutor's mind was this strange lift of increasing recklessness, the old proportion gone, the spiritual aspect of it troubling him to the point of sheer distress. He followed Leysin as blindly with his body as he followed this new Bindy eagerly with his mind.

For this languid boy, now dancing to the tune of flooding life at his very heels, seemed magical in the true sense: energy created as by a wizard out of nothing. From lips that ordinarily sighed in listless boredom poured now a ceaseless stream of questions and ejaculations, ringing with enthusiasm. How long would it take to reach the fiery ridge? Why did they go so slowly? Would they arrive too late? Would their intrusion be welcomed or understood? Already one great change was effected—accepted by Hendricks, too—that the *rôle* of mere spectator was impossible. The answers Hendricks gave, indeed, grew more and more encouraging and sympathetic. He, too, was impatient with their leader's crawling pace. Some elemental spell of wind and fire urged him toward the open ridge. The pull became irresistible. He despised the Pasteur's caution, denied his wisdom, wholly rejected now the spirit of compromise and prudence. And once, as the hurricane brought down a flying burst of voices, he caught himself leaping upon a big grey boulder in their path. He leaped at the very moment that the boy behind him leaped, yet hardly realized that he did so; his feet danced without a conscious order from his brain. They met together on the rounded top, stumbled, clutched one another frantically, then slid with waving arms and flying cloaks down the slippery surface of damp moss—laughing wildly.

"Fool!" cried Hendricks, saving himself.
"What in the world——?"

"*You* called," laughed Bindy, picking himself up and dropping back to his place in the rear again. "It's the wind, not me; it's in our feet. Half the time you're shouting and jumping yourself!"

And it was a few minutes after this that Lord Ernie suddenly forged ahead. He slipped in front as silently as a shadow before a moving candle in a room. Passing the tutor at a moment when his feet were entangled among roots and stones, he easily overtook the Pasteur and found himself in the lead. He never stumbled; there seemed steel spring in his legs.

From Leysin, too, breathless to interfere, came a cry of warning. "Stop him! Take his hand!" his tired voice instantly smothered by the roaring skies. He turned to catch Hendricks by the cloak. "You see *that*!" he shouted in alarm. "For the love of God don't lose sight of him! He must see, but not take part—remember——!"

And Hendricks yelled after the vanishing figure, "Bindy, go slow, go slow! Keep in touch with us." But he quickened his pace instantly, as though to overtake the boy. He passed his companion the same minute, and was out of sight. "I'll wait for you," came back the boy's shrill answer through the thinning trees. And a flare of light fell with it from the sky, for the final climb of a steep five hundred feet had now begun, and overhead the naked ridge ran east and west with its line of blazing fires. Boulders and rocky ground replaced the pines and spruces.

"But you'll never find the way," shouted Leysin, while a deep trumpeting roar of the storm beyond muffled the remainder of the sentence.

Hendricks heard the next words close beside him from a clump of shadows. He was in touching distance of the excited boy.

"The fires and the singing guide me. Only a fool could miss the way."

"But you *are* a——"

He swallowed the unuttered word. A new, extraordinary respect was suddenly in him. That tall, virile figure, instinct with life, springing so cleverly through the choking darkness, guiding with decision and intelligence, almost infallible—it was no fool that led them thus. He hurried after till his very sinews ached. His eyes, troubled and confused, strained through the trees to find him. But these same trees now fled past him in a torrent.

"Bindy, Bindy!" he cried at the top of his voice, yet not with the imperious tone the situation called for. The sentence dropped into a lull of wind. Instead of command there was entreaty, almost supplication, in it. "Wait for me, I'm coming. We'll see the glorious thing together!"

And then suddenly the forest lay behind him, with a belt of open pasture-land in front below the actual ridge. He felt the first great draught of heat, as a line of furnaces burst their doors with a mighty roar and turned the sky into a blaze of golden daylight. There was a crackling

as of musketry. The flare shot up and burned the air about him, and the voices of a multitude, as yet invisible, drove through it like projectiles on the wind. This was the first impression, wholesale and terrific, that met him as he paused an instant on the edge of the sheltering forest and looked forward. Leysin and Lord Ernie seemed to leave his mind, forgotten in this first attack of splendour, but forgotten, as it were, the first with contempt, the latter with an overwhelming regret. For the Pasteur's mistake in that instant seemed obvious. In half-measures lay the fatal error, and in compromise the danger. Bindy all along had known the better way and followed it. The lukewarm was the worthless.

"Bindy, boy, where are you? I'm coming..." and stepping on to the grassy strip of ground, soft to his feet, he met a wind that fell upon his body with a shower of blows from all directions at once and beat him to his knees. He dropped, it seemed, into the cover of a sheltering rock, for there followed then a moment of sudden and delicious stillness in which the weary muscles recovered themselves and thought grew slightly steadier. Crouched thus close to the earth he no longer offered a target to the hurricane's attack. He peered upward, making a screen of his hands.

The ridge, some fifty feet above him, he saw, ran in a generous platform along the mountain crest; it was wide and flat; between the enormous fires of piled-up wood that stretched for half a mile coiled a medley of dense smoke and

tearing sparks. No human beings were visible, and yet he was aware of crowding life quite near. On hands and knees, crawling painfully, he then slowly retreated again into the shelter of the forest he had sought to leave. He stood up. The awful blaze was veiled by the roof of branches once more. But as he rose, seizing a sapling to steady himself by, two hands caught him with violence from behind, and a familiar voice came shouting against his ear. Leysin, panting, dishevelled, and half broken with the speed, stood beside him.

"The boy! Where is he? We're just in time!" He roared the words to make them carry above the din. "Hurry, hurry! I'll follow. . . . My older legs. . . . See, for the love of God, that he is not taken. . . . I warned you!"

And for a second, as he heard, Hendricks caught at the vanished sense of responsibility again. He saw the face of the old Marquess watching him among the tree-trunks. He heard his voice, amazed, reproachful, furious: "It was criminal of you, criminal——!"

"Where is the boy—*your* boy?" again broke in the shout of the Pasteur with a slap of hurricane, as he staggered against the tutor, half collapsing, and trying to point the direction. "Watch him, find him for the love of heaven before it is too late—before they see him. . . !"

The tutor's normal and responsible self dived out of sight again as he heard the cry of weakness and alarm. It seemed the wind got under him,

lifting him bodily from his feet. He did not pause to think. Like a man midway in a whirling prize-fight, he felt dazed but confident, only conscious of one thing—that he must hold out to the end, take part in all the splendid fighting—*win*. The lust of the arena, the pride of youth and battle, the impetuous recklessness of the charge in primitive war caught at his heart, brimming it with headlong courage. To play the game for all it might be worth seemed shouted everywhere about him, as the abandon of wind and fire rushed through him like a storm. He felt lifted above all possibility of little failure. The Marquess with his conventional traditions, the Pasteur with his considerations of half-way safety, both vanished utterly; safety, indeed, both for himself and for the boy in his charge lay in unconditional surrender. This was no time for little thought-out actions. It was all or nothing!

“God bless the whirlwind and the fire!” he shouted, opening wide his arms.

But his voice was inaudible amid the uproar, and the forward movement of his body remained at first only in the brain. He turned to push the old man aside, even to strike him down if necessary. “Lukewarm yourself and a coward!” rose in his throat, yet found no utterance, for in that moment a tall, slim figure, swift as a shadow, steady as a hawk, shot hard across the open space between the forest and the ridge. In the direction of the blazing platform it disappeared against a curtain of thick

smoke, emerged for one second in a storm of light, then vanished finally behind a ruin of loose rocks. And Hendricks, his eyes wounded by heat and wind, his muscles paralysed, understood that the boy deliberately invited capture. The multitude that hid behind the smoke and fire, feeding the blazing heaps with eager hands, had become aware of him, and presently would appear to claim him. They would take him to themselves. Already answering flares ran east and west along the desolate ridge.

“I’ll join you! I’m coming! Wait for me!” he tried to cry. The uproar smothered it.

VIII

And this uproar, he now perceived, was composed entirely of wind and fire. Here, on the roof of the hills beneath a starry sky, these two great elements expressed their nature with unhampered freedom, for there was neither rain to modify the one, nor solid obstacle to check the other. Their voices merged in a single sound—the hollow boom of wind and the deep, resounding clap of flame. The splitting crackle of burning branches imitated the high, shrill whistle of the tearing gusts that, javelin-like, flew to and fro in darts of swifter sound. But one shout rose from the summit: no human cry distinguishable in it, nor amid the thousand lines of skeleton wood that pierced the golden background was any human outline visible. Fire and wind encouraged one another

to madness, manifesting in prodigious splendour by themselves.

Then, suddenly, before a gigantic canter of the wind, the driving smoke rolled upward like a curtain, and the flames, ceasing their wild flapping, soared steadily in gothic windows of living gold toward the stars. In towering rows between columns of black night they transformed the empty space between them into a colossal temple aisle. They tapered aloft symmetrically into vanishing crests. And Hendricks stood upright. Rising so that his shoulders topped the edge of the boulder, and utterly contemptuous of Leysin's hand that sought with violence to drag him into shelter, he gazed as one who sees a vision. For at first he could only stand and stare, aware of sensation but not of thought. An enormous, overpowering conviction blew his whole being to white heat. Here was a supply of elemental power that human beings—empty, needy, starved, deficient human beings—could use. His love for the boy leaped headlong at the skirts of this terrific salvation. A majestic possibility stormed through him.

Yet it was no nightmare wonder that met his staring and half-shielded eyes, although some touch of awful dream seemed in it, set, moreover, to a scale that scantier minds might deem distortion. The heat from some thirty fires, placed at regular intervals, made midnight quiver with immense vibrations. Of varying yet calculated size, these towering heaps emitted

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notes of measured and alternating depth, until the roar along the entire line produced a definite scale almost of melody, the near ones shrilly singing, those more distant booming with mountainous pedal notes. The consonance was monstrous, yet conformed to some magnificent diapason. This chord of fire-music paced the starlit sky, directed, but never overmastered, by the wind that measured it somehow into meaning. Repeated in quick succession, the notes now crashing in a mass, now singing alone in solitary beauty, the effect suggested an idea of ordered sequence, of gigantic rhythm. It seemed, indeed, as though some controlling agency, mastering excess, coerced both raging elements to express through this stupendous dance some definite idea. Here, as it were, was the alphabet of some natural, undifferentiated language, a language of sight and sound, pre-dating speech, symbolical in the ultimate, deific sense. Some Lord of Fire and some Lord of Air were in command. Harnessed and regulated, these formless cohorts of energy that men call stupidly mere flame and wind obeyed a higher Power that had invoked them, yet a Power that, by understanding their laws of being, held them most admirably in control.

This, at least, seems a hint of the explanation that flashed into Hendricks as he stared in amazed bewilderment from the shelter of the nearest boulder. He read a sentence in some natural, forgotten script. He watched a primitive ritual that once invoked the gods. He was

aware of rhythm, and he was aware of system, though as yet he did not see the hand that wrote this marvellous sentence on the night. For still the human element remained invisible. He only realized—in dim, blundering fashion—that he witnessed a revelation of those two powers which, in large, lie at the foundations of the Universe, and, in little, are the basic essentials of human existence—the powers behind heat and air. Fragments of that talk with Leysin stammered back across his mind, like letters in some stupendous word he dared not reconstruct entire. He shuddered and grew wise. Realms of forgotten being opened their doors before his dazzled sight. Vision fluttered into far, piercing vistas of ancient wonder, haunting and half-remembered, then lost its way in blindness that was pain. For a moment, it seemed, he was aware of majestic Presences behind the turmoil, shadowy but mighty, charged with a vague potentiality as of immense algebraical formulæ, symbolical and beyond full comprehension, yet willing and able to be used for practical results. He *felt* the elements as nerves of a living Universe. . . . Yet thinking was not really in him anywhere; feeling was all he knew. The world he moved in, as the script he read, belonged to conditions too utterly remote for reason to recover a single clue to their intelligible reconstruction. Glory, clean and strong as of primitive star-worship, passed between what he saw and all that he had ever known before. The curtain of conventional belief

was rent in twain. The terrific thing was true. . . .

For an unmeasured interval the tutor, oblivious of time and actual place, stood on the brink of this majestic pageant, staring with breathless awe, while the swaying of the entire scenery increased, like the sway of an ocean lifted to the sky by many winds. Then, suddenly, in one of those temporary lulls that passed between the beat of the great notes, his searching eyes discovered a new thing. The focus of his sight was altered, and he realized at last the source of the directing and the controlling power. Behind the fires and beyond the smoke he recognized the disc-like, shining ovals that upon this little earth stand in the image of the one, eternal Likeness. He saw the human faces, symbols of spiritual dominion over all lesser orders, each one possessed of belief, intelligence, and will. Singly so feeble, together so invincible, this assemblage, unscorched by the fire and by the wind unmoved, seemed to him impressive beyond all possible words. And a further inkling of the truth flashed on him as he stared: that a group of humans, a crowd, combining upon a given object with concentrated purpose, possessed of that terrific power, certain faith, may know in themselves the energy to move great mountains, and therefore that lesser energy to guide the fluid forces of the elements. And a sense of cosmic exultation leaped into his being. For a moment he knew a touch of almost frenzy. Proud joy rose in him like

a splendour of omnipotence. Humanity, it seemed to him, here came into a grand but long-neglected corner of its kingdom as originally planned by Heaven. Into the hands of a weakling and deficient boy the guidance had been given.

Motionless beneath the stars, lit by the glare till they shone like idols of yellow stone, and magnified by the sheets of flying, intolerable light the wind chased to and fro, these rows of faces appeared at first as a single line of undifferentiated fire against the background of the night. The eyes were all cast down in prayer, each mind focused steadily upon one clear idea—the control and assimilation of two elemental powers. The crowd was one; feeling was one; desire, command, and certain faith were one. The controlling power that resulted was irresistible.

Then came a remarkable, concerted movement. With one accord the eyes all opened, blazing with reflected fire. A hundred human countenances rose in a single shining line. The men stood upright. Swarthy faces, tanned by sun and wind, heads uncovered, hair and beards tossing in the air, turned all one way. Mouths opened too. There came a roar that even the hurricane could not drown—a word of command, it seemed, that sprang into the pulses of the dancing elements and reduced their turmoil to a wave of steadier movement. And at the same moment a hundred bodies, naked above the waist, arms outstretched and hands with the

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palms held upward, swayed forward through the smoke and fire. They came toward the spot where, half concealed from view, the tutor crouched and watched.

And Hendricks, thinking himself discovered, first quailed, then rose to meet them. No power to resist was in him. It was, rather, willing response that he experienced. He stepped out from the shelter of the boulder and entered the brilliant glare. Hatless himself, shoulders squared, cloak flying in the wind, he took three strides toward the advancing battalion—then, undecided, paused. For the line, he saw, disregarded him as though he were not there at all. It was not *him* the worshippers sought. The entire troop swept past to a point some fifty feet below where the end of the ridge broke out of the thinning trees. Beautiful as a curving wave of flame, the figures streamed across the narrow, open space with a drilled precision as of some battle-line, and Hendricks, with a sense of wild, secret triumph, saw them pause at the brink of the platformed ridge, form up their serried ranks yet closer, then open two hundred arms to welcome someone whom the darkness should immediately deliver. Simultaneously, from the covering trees, the tall, slim shadow of Lord Ernie darted out into the light.

“Magnificent!” cried Hendricks, but his voice was smothered instantly in a mightier sound, and his movement forward seemed ineffective stumbling. The hundred voices thundered out a single note. Like a deer the

boy leaped; like a tongue of flame he flew to join his own; and instantly was surrounded, borne shoulder-high upon those upturned palms, swept back in triumph toward the procession of enormous fires. Wrapped by smoke and sparks, lifted by wind, he became part of the monstrous rhythm that turned that mountain ridge alive. He stood upright upon the platform of interlacing arms; he swayed with their movements as a thing of wind and fire that flew. The shining faces vanished then, turned all toward the blazing piles, so that the boy had the appearance of standing on a wall of living black. His outline was visible a moment against the sky, firelight between his wide-stretched legs, streaming from his hair and horizontal arms, issuing almost, as it seemed, from his very body. The next second he leaped to the ground, ran forward—appallingly close—between two heaped-up fires, flung both hands heavenward, and—knelt.

And Hendricks, sympathetically following the boy's performance as though his own mind and body took part in it, experienced then a singular result; it seemed the heart in him began to roar. This was no rustle of excited blood that the little cavern of his skull increased, but a deeper sound that proclaimed the kinship of his entire being with the ritual. His own nature had begun to answer. From that moment he perceived the spectacle, not with the senses of sight and hearing separately, but with his entire body—synthetically. He became a part of this assembly

that was itself one single instrument: a cosmic sounding-board for the rhythmical expression of impersonal Nature Powers. Leysin, he dimly realized, fixed in his churchy tenets, remained outside, apart, and compromising; Hendricks accepted and went with. All little customary feelings dipped utterly away, lost, false, denied, even as a unit in a crowd loses its normal characteristics in the greater mood that sways the whole. The fire no longer burned him, for he was the fire; nor did he stagger against the furious wind, because the wind was in his heart. He moved all over, alive in every point and corner. With his skin he breathed, his bones and tissue ran with glorious heat. He cried aloud. He praised. "I am the whirlwind and I am the fire! Fire that lights but does not burn, and wind that blows the heart to flame!" His body sang it, or, rather, the elements sang it through his body; for the sound of his voice was not audible, and it was wind and fire that thundered forth his feeling in their crashing rhythm.

IX

And so it was that he no longer saw this thing pictorially, nor in the little detached reports the individual senses brought, but knew it in himself complete, as a man knows love and passion. Memory afterwards translated these vast central feelings into pictures, but the pictures touched reality without containing it. Like a vision it

happened all at once, as a room or landscape happens, and what happens all at once, coming through a synthesis of the senses, is not properly describable later. To instantaneous knowledge mere sequence is a falsehood. The sequence first enters with the telling afterwards. That kneeling form, he understood, was the empty vessel to which conventional life had hitherto denied the heat and air it craved. The breath of life now poured at full tide into it, the fire of deity lit its heart of touchwood, wind blew into desire; and later flame would burst forth in action, consuming opposition. He must let it fill to the brim. It was not salvation, but creation. Then thought went out, extinguished by a stroke of something greater. . . .

For beyond the smoke and sparks, beyond the space the men had occupied, a new and gentler movement, lyrical with bird-like beauty, ran suddenly along the ridge. What Hendricks had taken for branches heaped in rows for the burning stirred marvellously throughout their whole collective mass, stirred sweetly, too, and with an exquisite loveliness. The entire line rose gracefully into the air with a whirr as of sweeping birds. There was a soft and undulating motion as though a draught of flowing wind turned faintly visible, yet with an increasing brilliance, like shining lilies of flame that now flocked forward in a troop, bending deliciously all one way. And in the same second these tall lilies of fire revealed themselves as figures, naked above the waist, hair streaming on the wind,

eyes alight and bare arms waving. Above the men's deep pedal bass their voices rose with clear, shrill sweetness on the storm. The band swept forward swift as wind toward the kneeling boy. The long line curved about him foldingly. The women took him as the south wind takes a bird.

There may have been—indeed, there was—an interval, for Hendricks caught, again and again repeated, the boy's great cry of passionate delight above the tumult. Ringing and virile it rose to heaven, clear as a fine-wrought bell. And instantaneously the knitted figures of flame disentangled themselves again, the mass unfolded like an opening flower, and, as by a military word of command, dissolved itself once more into a long thin line of running fire. The women advanced, and the waiting men flowed forward in a stream to meet them. This interweaving of the figures was as easily accomplished as the mingling of light and heavy threads upon some living loom. Hands joining hands, all singing, these naked worshippers of fire and wind passed in and out among the blazing piles with a headlong precision that was torrential and yet orderly. The speed increased; the faces flashed and vanished, then flashed and passed again; each woman between two men, each man between two women, and Lord Ernie, radiantly alive, between two girls of rich, o'erflowing beauty. Their movements were undulating, like the undulations of fire, yet with sudden, unexpected upward leaps as when fire

is partnered abruptly by a cantering wind. For the women were fire, and the men were wind. The imitative dance was in full swing. The marvellous wind and fire ritual unrolled its old-world magic.

It was awe-inspiring certainly, but for Hendricks, as he watched, the terror of big conflagrations was wholly absent: rather, he felt the sense of deep security that rhythmic movement causes. Bathed in a sea of elemental power, he burned to share the pagan splendour and the rush of primitive delight. It seemed he had a cosmic body in which new centres stirred to life, linking him on to this source of natural forces. Through these centres he drew the chaotic energy into nerves and blood and muscle, into the very substance of his thought, indeed, transmuting them into the magic of the will. Abundant and inexhaustible vigour filled the air, pouring freely into whatever empty receptacle lay at hand. Sheets of flame, whole separate fragments of it, torn at the edges, raced, loudly, hungrily flapping on vehement gusts of wind; curved as they flew; leaped, twisted, flashed, and vanished. And the figures closely copied them. The women tossed their bodies aloft, then dipped suddenly to the earth, invisible, till the rushing men urged them into view again with wild impetuous swing, so that the entire line stretched and contracted like an immense elastic band of life, now knotted, now dissolved.

Yet, while of raging and terrific beauty, there

was never that mad abandon which is disorder; but rather a kind of sacred natural revel that prohibited mere licence. There was even a singular austerity in it that betrayed a definite ritual and not mere reckless pageantry. No walls could possibly have contained it. In cathedral, temple, or measured space, however grand, it could only have seemed exaggerated and apostate; here, beneath the open sky, it was beautiful and true. For overhead the stars burned clear and steady, the constellations watching it from their immovable towers—a representation of their own leisured and hierarchic dance in swifter miniature. And indeed this relationship it bore to a universal rhythm was the key, it seemed, to its deep significance; for the close imitation of natural movements seduced the colossal powers of fire and wind to swell human emotions till they became mould and vessel for this elemental manifestation in men and women. Golden yellow in the blaze, the limbs of the women flashed and passed; their hair flew dark a moment across gleaming breasts; and their waving arms tossed in ever-shifting patterns through the driving smoke. The fires boiled and roared, scattering torrents of showering sparks like stars; and amid it all the slim white shoulders of the boy, his clothes torn from him, his eyes ablaze, and his lips opened to the singing as though he had known it always, drove to and fro on the crest of the ritual like some flying figure of wind and fire incarnate.

All of which, instantaneously yet in sequence,

Hendricks witnessed, painted upon the wild night sky. A volcanic energy poured through him too. He knew a golden enthusiasm of immeasurable strength, of unconquerable hope, of irresistible delight. Wind set his feet to dancing, and fire swept across his face without a trace of burning.

Nature was part of him. He had stepped inside. No obstacle existed that could withstand for a single second the torrential energy that fired his heart and blood. There was lightning in his veins. He could sweep aside life's difficult barriers with the ease of a tornado, and shake the rubbish of doubt and care from the years with earthquake shocks. Empires he could mould, and play with nations, drive men and women before him like a flock of sheep, shatter convention, and dislocate the machinery time has foisted upon natural energies. He knew in himself the omnipotence of the lesser elemental deities. Yet, as sympathetic observer, he can but have felt a tithe of what Lord Ernie felt.

"We are the whirlwind and we are the fire!" he cried aloud with the rushing worshippers. "We are unconquerable and immense! We destroy the lukewarm and absorb the weak! For we can make evil into good by bending it all one way! . . ."

The roar swept thunderingly past him, catching at his voice and body. He felt himself snatched forward by the wind. The fire licked sweetly at him. It was the final abandonment. He plunged recklessly toward the surge of dancers. . . .

X

What stopped him he did not know. Some hard and steely thing pricked sharply into him. An opposing power, fierce as a sword, stabbed at his heart—and he heard a little sound quite close beside him, a sound that pierced the babel, reaching his consciousness as from far away.

“Keep still! Cling tight to this old rock! Hold yourself in, or else they’ll have you too!”

It was as if some insect scratched within his ear. His arm, that same instant, was violently seized. He came down with a crash. He had been half in the air. He had been dancing.

“Turn your eyes away, away! Take hold of this big tree!” The voice cried furiously, but with a petty human passion in it that marred the world. There was an intolerable revulsion in him as he heard it. He felt himself dragged forcibly backward. He lost his balance, stumbling among loose stones.

“Loose me! Let me go!” he shouted, struggling like a wild animal, yet vainly, against the inflexible grip that held him. “I am one with the fire that lights but does not burn. I am the wind that blows the worlds along! Damnation take you. . . . Let me free . . . !”

Confusion caught him, smothering speech and blinding sight. He fell backward, away from the heat and wind. He was furious, but furious with he knew not whom or what. The interference had destroyed the rhythm, broken

it into fragments. Violent impulses clashed through him without the will to choose or guide them. For power had deserted him and flowed elsewhere. He stood no longer in the stream of energy. He was emptied. And at first he could not tell whether his instinct was to return himself, to rescue his precious boy, or—to crush the interfering object out of existence with what was left to him of raging anger. He turned, stood up, and flung the Pasteur aside with violence. He raised his feet to stamp and kill . . . when a phrase with meaning darted suddenly across his wild confusion and recalled him to some fragment of truer responsibility and life.

“ . . . There’ll be only violence in him—reckless violence instead of strength—destructive. Save him before it is too late! ”

“ It *is* too late,” he roared in answer. “ What devil hinders me? ”

But his roar was feeble, and his ironed boots refused the stamping. Power slipped wholly out of him. The rhythm poured past instead of through him. Interference had destroyed the circuit. More glimmerings of responsibility came back. He stooped like a drunken man and helped the other to his feet. The rapidity of the change was curious, proving that the spell had been put upon him from without. It was not, as with the boy, mere development of pre-existing tendencies.

“ Help me,” he implored suddenly instead, “ help me! There has been madness in me.

For God's sake, help me to get him out!" It seemed the face of the old Marquess, stern and terrible, broke an instant through the smoky air, black with reproach and anger. And with a violent effort of the will Hendricks turned round to face the elemental orgy, bent on rescue. But this time the heat was intolerable and drove him back. The hair, hitherto untouched, now singed upon his head. Fire licked his very breath away. He bent double, covering his face with arms and cloak.

"Pray!" shouted Leysin, dropping to his knees. "It is the only way. My God is higher than this. Pray, pray!"

And, automatically, Hendricks fell upon his knees beside him, though to pray he knew not how. For no real faith was in him as in the other, and his eye was far from single. The fast-fading grandeur of what he had experienced still left its pagan tumult in his blood. The pretence of prayer could only have been blasphemy. He watched instead, letting the other invoke his mighty Deity alone, that Deity he had served unflinchingly all his life with faith and fasting, and with belief beyond assault.

It was an impressive picture, fraught with passionate drama. On his knees behind a sheltering boulder, a blackened pine-tree tossing scorched branches above his head, this righteous man prayed to his God, sure of his triumphant answer. Hendricks watched with an admiration that made him realize his own insignificance. The eyes were closed, the leonine big head set

firm upon the diminutive body, the face now lit by flame, now veiled by smoke, the strong hands clasped together and upraised. He envied him. He recognized, too, that the elements themselves, with all their chaos of might and terror, were after all but servants of the Vastness which dips the butterflies in colour and puts down upon the breasts of little robins. And because the Pasteur's life had been always prayer in action, his little human will invoked the Will of Greatness, merged with it, used it, and directed it steadily against the commotion of these unleashed elements. Certain of himself and of his God, the Pasteur never doubted. His prayer set instantly in action those forces which balance suns and keep the stars afloat.

Thus, trembling with terror that made him wholly ineffective, Hendricks watched, and, as he watched, became aware of the amazing change. For it seemed as if a stream of power, steady and in opposition to the tumult, now poured audaciously against the elemental rhythm, altering its direction, modifying gradually its stupendous impetus. There were pauses in the huge vibrations: they wavered, broke, and fled. They knew confusion, as when the prow of a steel-nosed vessel drives against the tide. The tide is vaster, but the steel is—different. The whole sky shivered as this new entering force, so small, so soft, yet of such incalculable energy, began at once its overmastering effect. Signs of violence or rout, or of anything disordered, had no part in it;

excess before it slipped into willing harness; there was light that sponged away all glare, as when morning sunshine cleans a forest of its shadows. Some little whispering power sang marvellously as of old across the desolate big mountains, "Peace! Be still!" turning the monstrous turbulence into obedient sweetness. And upon his face and hands Hendricks felt faint, delicate touches of some refreshing softness that he could not understand.

Yet not instantly was this harmony restored; at first there was the stress of vehement opposition. The night of wind and fire drove roaring through the sky. There were bursts of triumphant tumult, but convulsion in them and no true steadiness as before. The human figures hitherto had danced with that fluid appearance which belongs to fire, and with that instantaneous rush which is of wind, the men increasing the women, and the women answering with joy; limbs and faces had melted into each other till the circular ritual looked like a glowing wheel of flame rotating audibly. But slowly now the speed of the wheel decreased; the single utterance was marred by the crying of many voices, all at different pitch, discordant, inharmonious, dismayed. The fires somehow dwindled; there came pauses in the wind; and Hendricks became aware of a curious hissing noise, as more and more of these odd soft touches found his face and hands. Here and there, he saw, a figure stumbled, fell, then gathered itself clumsily together again with a frightened shout, breaking

violently out of the circle. More and more these figures blundered and dropped out; and although they returned again, so that the dance apparently increased, these were but moments in the final violence of the dispersing hurricane. The rejected ones dashed back wildly into the wrong places; men and women no longer stood alternate, but in groups together, falsely related. The entire movement was dislocated; the ceremony grew rapidly incoherent; meaning forsook it. The composite instrument that had transmuted the elemental forces into human, emotional storage was imperfect, broken, out of tune. The disarray turned rout.

And then it was, while Leysin continued without ceasing his burning and successful prayer, that his companion, conscious of returning harmony, rose to his feet, aware suddenly that he could also help. A portion of the powers he had absorbed still worked in him, but in a new direction. He felt confident and unafraid. He did not stumble. With unerring tread he advanced toward the lessening fires, feeling as he did so the cold, soft touches multiply with a rush upon his skin. From all sides they came by hundreds, like messengers of help.

“Ernest!” he cried aloud, and his voice, though little raised, carried resonantly above the dying turmoil, “Ernest! Come back to us. Your father calls you!”

And from threescore faces hurrying in confusion through the smoke one paused and turned. It stood apart, hovering as though in air, while

the mob of disordered figures rushed in a body along the ridge. Plunging like frightened cattle below the farther edge, then vanishing into thick darkness, they left behind them this one solitary face. A final dying flame licked out at it; a rush of smoke drove past to hide it; there was a high, wild scream—and the figure shot forward with a headlong leap and fell with a crash at Hendricks' feet. Lord Ernie, blackened by smoke and scorched by fire, lay safe outside the danger zone.

And Hendricks knelt beside him. Remorse and shame made him powerless to do more as he pulled the torn clothing over the neck and chest and heard his own heart begging for forgiveness. He realized his own weakness and faithlessness. A great temptation had found him wanting. . . .

It was owing to Leysin that the rescue was complete. The Pasteur was instantly by his side.

"Saved as by water," he cried, as he folded his cloak about the prostrate body, and then raised the head and shoulders; "saved by His ministers of rain. For His miracles are love, and work through natural laws."

He made a sign to Hendricks. Carrying the boy between them, they scrambled down the slope into the shelter of the trees below. The cold, soft touches were then explained. The *joran* had dropped as suddenly as it rose, and the torrential rain that invariably follows now poured in rivers from the sky. Water, drenching the fires and padding the savage wind, had

stopped the dancers midway in their frenzied ritual. It was the element they dreaded, for it was hostile. Rain soused the mountain ridge, extinguishing the last embers of the numerous fires. It rushed in rivulets between their feet. The heated earth gave out a hissing steam, and the only sound in the spaces where wind and fire had boomed and thundered a little while before was now the splash of water and the drip of quenching drops.

In the cover of the sheltering trees the body stirred, lifted its head, and sat up slowly. The eyes opened.

"I'm cold. I'm frightened," whispered a shivering voice. "Where am I?"

Only the pelt and thud of the rain sounded behind the quavering words.

"Where are the others? Have I been away? Hendricks—Mr Hendricks—is that you——?"

He stared about him, his face now a mere luminous disc in the thick darkness. No breath of wind was loose. They spoke to him till he answered with assurance, groping to find their hands with his own, his words confused and strange with hidden meaning for a time. "I'm all right now," he kept repeating. "I know exactly. It was one of my big dreams . . . I suppose I fell asleep . . . and the rain woke me. Great heavens! What a night to be out." And then he clambered vigorously to his feet with a sudden movement of great energy again, saying that hunger was in him and he must eat. There was no complaint of heat or cold,

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of burning or of bruises. The boy recovered marvellously. In ten minutes, breaking away from all support, he led, as they descended through the dripping forest in the gloom and chill of very early morning. It was the others who called to him for guidance in the tangled woods. Lord Ernie was in the lead. Throughout the difficult woods he was ever in front, and singing:

“Fire that lights but does not burn! And wind that blows the heart to flame! They both are in me now for ever and ever! Oh, praise the Lord of Fire and the Lord of Wind. . . !”

And this voice, now near, now distant, sounding through the dripping forest on their homeward journey, was an experience weird and unforgettable for those other two. Leysin, it seemed, had one sentence only which he kept repeating to himself—“Heaven grant he may direct it all for good. For they have filled him to the brim, and he is become an instrument of power.”

But Hendricks, though he understood the risk, felt only confidence. Lord Ernie's regeneration had begun.

Soaked and bedraggled, all three, they reached the village about two o'clock. The boy, utterly unmanageable, said an emphatic No to spirits, soup, or medical appliances. His skin, indeed, showed no signs of burning, nor was there the smallest symptom of cold or fever in him. “I'm a perfect furnace,” he laughed; “I feel health and strength personified.” And the

brightness of his eyes, his radiant colour, the vigour of his voice and manner—both in some way astonishing—made all pretence of assistance unnecessary and absurd. “It’s like a new birth,” he cried to Hendricks, as he almost cantered beside him down the road to their house, “and, by Jove, I’ll wake ’em up at home and make the world go round. I know a hundred schemes. I tell you, sir, I’m simply bursting! For the first time I’m alive!”

And an hour later, when the tutor peeped in upon him, the boy was calmly sleeping. The candle-light, shaded carefully with one hand, fell upon the face. There were new lines and a new expression in it. Will and purpose showed in the stern set of the lips and jaw. It was the face of a man, and of a man one would not lightly trifle with. Purpose, will, and power were established on their thrones. To such a man the entire world might one day bow the head.

“If only it will last,” thought Hendricks, as shaken, bewildered, and more than a little awed, he tiptoed out of the room again and went to bed. But through his dreams, sheeted in flame and veiled in angry smoke, the face of the old Marquess glowered upon him from a heavy sky above ancestral towers.

XI

From the obituary notices of the 9th Marquess of Oakham the following selections have their interest: He succeeded to his father, then in the
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Cabinet as Minister for Foreign Affairs, at the age of twenty-one. His career was brief but singular, the early magnificence of the younger Pitt offering a standard of comparison, though by no means a parallel, to his short record of astonishing achievement. His effect upon the world, first as Chief of the Government Labour Department and subsequently as Home Secretary, and Minister of War, is described as shattering, even cataclysmic. His public life lasted five years. He died at the age of twenty-nine. His personality was revolutionary and overwhelming.

For, judging by these extracts, he was a "Napoleonic figure whose personal influence combined the impetus of Mirabeau and the dominance of Alexander. His authority held an incalculable element, precisely described as uncanny. His spirit was puissant, elemental, his activity irresistible." Yet, according to another journal, "he was, properly speaking, neither intellectual, astute, nor diplomatic, and possessed as little subtlety as might be expected of a miner whose psychology was called upon to explain the Trinity. In no sense was he statesman, and even less strategist, yet his name swept Europe, changed the map of the Nearer East, its mere whisper among the Chancelleries convulsing men's counsels with an influence almost menacing."

His enthusiasm appears to have been amazing. "Some stupendous and untiring energy drove through him, paralysing attack, and rendering the bitterest and most skilful opposition nugatory.

His hand was imperious, upsetting with a touch the chessboards set by the most able statecraft, and his voice was heard with a kind of reverence in every capital."

The brevity of his astonishing career called for universal comment, as did the hypnotizing effect of his singular ascendancy. "In five short years of power he achieved his sway. He rushed upon the world, he shook it, he retired," as one journal picturesquely phrased it. "The manner of his ending, moreover—a stroke of lightning—seemed in keeping with his life. There was neither lingering, delay, nor warning. Of distinguished stock, noble, yet ordinary enough in all but name, his power is unexplained by heredity; his family furnished no approach to greatness, as history supplied no parallel to his dynamic intensity. Nor, we are informed, among his near of kin, does any inherit his volcanic energy."

The world, however, was apparently well relieved of his tumultuous presence, for his influence was generally surveyed as "destructive rather than constructive." He was unmarried, and the title went to a nephew.

The cheaper journals abounded, of course, in details of his personal and private life that were freely copied into the foreign Press, and supply curious material for the student of human nature and the psychologist. The amazing revelations no doubt were picturesquely exaggerated, yet the substratum of truth in them all was generally admitted. No contradictions,

at any rate, appeared. They read like the story of some primitive, wild giant let loose upon the world—primitive because his specific brain-power was admittedly of no high order; wild because he was in favour of fierce, spontaneous action, and his mere presence, on occasions, could stir a nation, not alone a crowd, to vehement, terrific methods. His energy seemed inexhaustible, his fire inextinguishable.

Legends were rife, even before he died, among the peasantry of his Scotch estates, that he was in league with the devil. His habit of keeping enormous fires in his private rooms, fires that burned day and night from January to December, and in open hearths widened to thrice their natural size, stimulated the growth of this particular myth among those of his personal environment. All manner of stories raged. But it was his strange custom out-of-doors that provided the diabolical suggestion. For, "behind a specially walled-in space on an open ridge, denuded of pines, in a distant part of the estate, a series of gigantic heaps of wood, all ready to ignite, were—it was said—kept in a state of constant preparedness. And on stormy nights, especially when winds were high, and invariably at the period of the equinoctial tempests, his lordship would himself light these tremendous bonfires, and spend the nocturnal hours in their blazing presence, communing, the stories variously relate, with the witches at their Sabbath, or with hordes of fire-spirits, who emerged from the Bottomless Pit in order

to feed his soul with their unquenchable supplies. From these nightly orgies, it seems clear, at any rate, he returned at dawn with a splendour of energy that no one could resist, and with a mien whose grandeur invited worship rather than inspired alarm."

His biography, it was further stated, would be written by Sir John Hendricks, Bt., who began life as private secretary to his father, the 8th Marquess, but whose rapid rise to position was due to his intimate association as trusted friend and adviser to the subject of these obituary notices. The biography, however, had not appeared within five years of Lord Oakham's sudden death, and curiosity is only further stimulated by the suggestive whisper that it never will, and never can appear.

From "Incredible Adventures"

THE SACRIFICE

LIMASSON was a religious man, though of what depth and quality were unknown, since no trial of ultimate severity had yet tested him. An adherent of no particular creed, he yet had his gods; and his self-discipline was probably more rigorous than his friends conjectured. He was so reserved. Few guessed, perhaps, the desires conquered, the passions regulated, the inner tendencies trained and schooled—not by denying their expression, but by transmuting them alchemically into nobler channels. He had in him the makings of an enthusiastic devotee, and might have become such but for two limitations that prevented. He loved his wealth, labouring to increase it to the neglect of other interests; and, secondly, instead of following up one steady line of search, he scattered himself upon many picturesque theories, like an actor who wants to play all parts rather than concentrate on one. And the more picturesque the part, the more he was attracted. Thus, though he did his duty unshrinkingly and with a touch of love, he accused himself sometimes of merely gratifying a sensuous taste in spiritual sensations. There was this unbalance in him that argued want of depth.

As for his gods—in the end he discovered their reality by first doubting, then denying their existence.

It was this denial and doubt that restored them to their thrones, converting his dilettante skirmishes into genuine, deep belief; and the proof came to him one summer in early June when he was making ready to leave town for his annual month among the mountains.

With Limasson mountains, in some inexplicable sense, were a passion almost, and climbing so deep a pleasure that the ordinary scrambler hardly understood it. Grave as a kind of worship it was to him; the preparations for an ascent, the ascent itself in particular, involved a concentration that seemed symbolical as of a ritual. He not only loved the heights, the massive grandeur, the splendour of vast proportions blocked in space, but loved them with a respect that held a touch of awe. The emotion mountains stirred in him, one might say, was of that profound, incalculable kind that held kinship with his religious feelings, half realized though these were. His gods had their invisible thrones somewhere among the grim, forbidding heights. He prepared himself for this annual mountaineering with the same earnestness that a holy man might approach a solemn festival of his church.

And the impetus of his mind was running with big momentum in this direction when there fell upon him, almost on the eve of starting, a swift series of disasters that shook his being to

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its last foundations, and left him stunned among the ruins. To describe these is unnecessary. People said, "One thing after another like that! What appalling luck! Poor wretch!" then wondered, with the curiosity of children, how in the world he would take it. Due to no apparent fault of his own, these disasters were so sudden that life seemed in a moment shattered, and his interest in existence almost ceased. People shook their heads and thought of the emergency exit. But Limasson was too vital a man to dream of annihilation. Upon him it had a different effect—he turned and questioned what he called his gods. They did not answer or explain. For the first time in his life he doubted. A hair's-breadth beyond lay definite denial.

The ruin in which he sat, however, was not material; no man of his age, possessed of courage and a working scheme of life, would permit disaster of a material order to overwhelm him. It was collapse of a mental, spiritual kind, an assault upon the roots of character and temperament. Moral duties laid suddenly upon him threatened to crush. His *personal* existence was assailed, and apparently must end. He must spend the remainder of his life caring for others who were nothing to him. No outlet showed, no way of escape, so diabolically complete was the combination of events that rushed his inner trenches. His faith was shaken. A man can but endure so much, and remain human. For him the saturation point seemed reached. He experienced the spiritual equivalent

of that physical numbness which supervenes when pain has touched the limit of endurance. He laughed, grew callous, then mocked his silent gods.

It is said that upon this state of blank negation there follows sometimes a condition of lucidity which mirrors with crystal clearness the forces driving behind life at a given moment, a kind of clairvoyance that brings explanation and therefore peace. Limasson looked for this in vain. There was the doubt that questioned, there was the sneer that mocked the silence into which his questions fell; but there was neither answer nor explanation, and certainly not peace. There was no relief. In this tumult of revolt he did none of the things his friends suggested or expected; he merely followed the line of least resistance. He yielded to the impetus that was upon him when the catastrophe came. To their indignant amazement he went out to his mountains.

All marvelled that at such a time he could adopt so trivial a line of action, neglecting duties that seemed paramount; they disapproved. Yet in reality he was taking no definite action at all, but merely drifting with the momentum that had been acquired just before. He was bewildered with so much pain, confused with suffering, stunned with the crash that flung him helpless amid undeserved calamity. He turned to the mountains as a child to its mother, instinctively. Mountains had never failed to bring him consolation, comfort, peace. Their grandeur restored proportion whenever disorder threatened life. No calculation, properly speak-

ing, was in his move at all; but a blind desire for a violent physical reaction such as climbing brings. And the instinct was more wholesome than he knew.

In the high upland valley among lonely peaks whither Limasson then went he found in some measure the proportion he had lost. He studiously avoided thinking; he lived in his muscles recklessly. The region with its little inn was familiar to him; peak after peak he attacked, sometimes with, but more often without a guide, until his reputation as a sane climber, a laurelled member of all the foreign Alpine Clubs, was seriously in danger. That he overdid it physically is beyond question, but that the mountains breathed into him some portion of their enormous calm and deep endurance is also true. His gods, meanwhile, he neglected utterly for the first time in his life. If he thought of them at all, it was as tinsel figures imagination had created, figures upon a stage that merely decorated life for those whom pretty pictures pleased. Only—he had left the theatre and their make-believe no longer hypnotized his mind. He realized their impotence and disowned them. This attitude, however, was subconscious; he lent to it no substance, either of thought or speech. He ignored rather than challenged their existence.

And it was somewhat in this frame of mind—thinking little, feeling even less—that he came out into the hotel vestibule after dinner one evening and took mechanically the bundle of

letters the porter handed to him. They had no possible interest for him; in a corner where the big steam-heater mitigated the chilliness of the hall he idly sorted them. The score or so of other guests, chiefly expert climbing men, were trailing out in twos and threes from the dining-room; but he felt as little interest in them as in his letters: no conversation could alter facts, no written phrases change his circumstances. At random, then, he opened a business letter with a typewritten address—it would probably be impersonal, less of a mockery, therefore, than the others with their tiresome sham condolences. And, in a sense, it was impersonal; sympathy from a solicitor's office is mere formula, a few extra ticks upon the universal keyboard of a Remington. But as he read it Limasson made a discovery that startled him into acute and bitter sensation. He had imagined the limit of bearable suffering and disaster already reached. Now, in a few dozen words, his error was proved convincingly. The fresh blow was dislocating.

This culminating news of additional catastrophe disclosed within him entirely new reaches of pain, of biting, resentful fury. Limasson experienced a momentary stopping of the heart as he took it in, a dizziness, a violent sensation of revolt whose impotence induced almost physical nausea. He felt like—death.

“Must I suffer all things?” flashed through his arrested intelligence in letters of fire.

There was a sullen rage in him, a dazed

bewilderment, but no positive suffering as yet. His emotion was too sickening to include the smaller pains of disappointment; it was primitive, blind anger that he knew. He read the letter calmly, even to the neat paragraph of machine-made sympathy at the last, then placed it in his inner pocket. No outward sign of disturbance was upon him; his breath came slowly; he reached over to the table for a match, holding it at arm's-length lest the sulphur fumes should sting his nostrils.

And in that moment he made his second discovery. The fact that further suffering was still possible included also the fact that some touch of resignation had been left in him, and therefore some vestige of belief as well. Now, as he felt the crackling sheet of stiff paper in his pocket, watched the sulphur die, and saw the wood ignite, this remnant faded utterly away. Like the blackened end of the match, it shrivelled and dropped off. It vanished. Savagely, yet with an external calmness that enabled him to light his pipe with untrembling hand, he addressed his futile deities. And once more in fiery letters there flashed across the darkness of his passionate thought:

“Even this you demand of me—this cruel, ultimate sacrifice?”

And he rejected them, bag and baggage; for they were a mockery and a lie. With contempt he repudiated them for ever. The stage of doubt had passed. He denied his gods. Yet with a smile upon his lips; for what were they after all but the puppets his religious fancy had

imagined? They never had existed. Was it, then, merely the picturesque, sensational aspect of his devotional temperament that had created them? That side of his nature, in any case, was dead now, killed by a single devastating blow. The gods went with it.

Surveying what remained of his life, it seemed to him like a city that an earthquake has reduced to ruins. The inhabitants think no worse thing could happen. Then comes the fire.

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Two lines of thought, it seems, then developed parallel in him and simultaneously, for while underneath he stormed against this culminating blow, his upper mind dealt calmly with the project of a great expedition he would make at dawn. He had engaged no guide. As an experienced mountaineer he knew the district well; his name was tolerably familiar, and in half an hour he could have settled all details, and retired to bed with instructions to be called at two. But, instead, he sat there waiting, unable to stir, a human volcano that any moment might break forth into violence. He smoked his pipe as quietly as though nothing had happened, while through the blazing depths of him ran ever this one self-repeating statement: "Even this you demand of me, this cruel, ultimate sacrifice! . . ." His self-control, dynamically estimated, just then must have been very great, and, thus repressed, the store of potential energy accumulated enormously.

With thought concentrated largely upon this final blow, Limasson had not noticed the people who streamed out of the *salle à manger* and scattered themselves in groups about the hall. Some individual, now and again, approached his chair with the idea of conversation, then, seeing his absorption, turned away. Even when a climber whom he slightly knew reached across him with a word of apology for the matches, Limasson made no response, for he did not see him. He noticed nothing. In particular he did not notice two men who, from an opposite corner, had for some time been observing him. He now looked up—by chance?—and was vaguely aware that they were discussing him. He met their eyes across the hall, and started.

For at first he thought he knew them. Possibly he had seen them about in the hotel—they seemed familiar—yet he certainly had never spoken with them. Aware of his mistake, he turned his glance elsewhere, though still vividly conscious of their attention. One was a clergyman or a priest; his face wore an air of gravity touched by sadness, a sternness about the lips counteracted by a kindling beauty in the eyes that betrayed enthusiasm nobly regulated. There was a suggestion of stateliness in the man that made the impression very sharp. His clothing emphasized it. He wore a dark tweed suit that was strict in its simplicity. There was austerity in him somewhere.

His companion, perhaps by contrast, seemed

inconsiderable in his conventional evening-dress. A good deal younger than his friend, his hair, always a tell-tale detail, was a trifle long; the thin fingers that flourished a cigarette wore rings; the face, though picturesque, was flippant, and his entire attitude conveyed a certain insignificance. Gesture, that faultless language which challenges counterfeit, betrayed unbalance somewhere. The impression he produced, however, was shadowy compared to the sharpness of the other. "Theatrical" was the word in Limasson's mind, as he turned his glance elsewhere. But as he looked away he fidgeted. The interior darkness caused by the dreadful letter rose about him. It engulfed him. Dizziness came with it. . . .

Far away the blackness was fringed with light, and through this light, stepping with speed and carelessness as from great distance, the two men, suddenly grown large, came at him. Limasson, in self-protection, turned to meet them. Conversation he did not desire. Somehow he had expected this attack.

Yet the instant they began to speak—it was the priest who opened fire—it was all so natural and easy that he almost welcomed the diversion. A phrase by way of introduction—and he was speaking of the summits. Something in Limasson's mind turned over. The man was a serious climber, one of his own species. The sufferer felt a certain relief as he heard the invitation, and realized, though dully, the compliment involved.

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"If you felt inclined to join us—if you would honour us with your company," the man was saying quietly, adding something then about "your great experience" and "invaluable advice and judgment."

Limasson looked up, trying hard to concentrate and understand.

"The Tour du Néant?" he repeated, mentioning the peak proposed. Rarely attempted, never conquered, and with an ominous record of disaster, it happened to be the very summit he had meant to attack himself next day.

"You have engaged guides?" He knew the question foolish.

"No guide will try it," the priest answered, smiling, while his companion added with a flourish, "But we—we need no guide—if *you* will come."

"You are unattached, I believe? You are alone?" the priest inquired, moving a little in front of his friend, as though to keep him in the background.

"Yes," replied Limasson. "I am quite alone."

He was listening attentively, but with only part of his mind. He realized the flattery of the invitation. Yet it was like flattery addressed to someone else. He felt himself so indifferent, so—dead. These men wanted his skilful body, his experienced mind; and it was his body and mind that talked with them, and finally agreed to go. Many a time expeditions had been planned in just this way, but to-night he felt

there was a difference. Mind and body signed the agreement, but his soul, listening elsewhere and looking on, was silent. With his rejected gods it had left him, though hovering close still. It did not interfere; it did not warn; it even approved; it sang to him from great distance that this expedition cloaked another. He was bewildered by the clashing of his higher and his lower mind.

"At one in the morning, then, if that will suit you . . ." the older man concluded.

"I'll see to the provisions," exclaimed the younger enthusiastically, "and I shall take my telephoto for the summit. The porters can come as far as the Great Tower. We're over six thousand feet here already, you see, so . . ." and his voice died away in the distance as his companion led him off.

Limasson saw him go with relief. But for the other man he would have declined the invitation. At heart he was indifferent enough. What decided him really was the coincidence that the Tour du Néant was the very peak he had intended to attack himself *alone*, and the curious feeling that this expedition cloaked another somehow—almost that these men had a hidden motive. But he dismissed the idea—it was not worth thinking about. A moment later he followed them to bed. So careless was he of the affairs of the world, so dead to mundane interests, that he tore up his other letters and tossed them into a corner of the room—unread.

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II

Once in his chilly bedroom he realized that his upper mind had permitted him to do a foolish thing; he had drifted like a schoolboy into an unwise situation. He had pledged himself to an expedition with two strangers, an expedition for which normally he would have chosen his companions with the utmost caution. Moreover, he was guide; they looked to him for safety, while yet it was they who had arranged and planned it. But who were these men with whom he proposed to run grave bodily risks? He knew them as little as they knew him. Whence came, he wondered, the curious idea that this climb was really planned by another who was not one of them?

The thought slipped idly across his mind; going out by one door, it came back, however, quickly by another. He did not think about it more than to note its passage through the disorder that passed with him just then for thinking. Indeed, there was nothing in the whole world for which he cared a single brass farthing.

As he undressed for bed he said to himself: "I shall be called at one . . . but why am I going with these two on this wild plan? . . . And who made the plan?"

It seemed to have settled itself. It came about so naturally and easily, so quickly. He probed no deeper. He didn't care. And for the first time he omitted the little ritual, half

prayer, half adoration, it had always been his custom to offer to his deities upon retiring to rest. He no longer recognized them.

How utterly broken his life was! How blank and terrible and lonely! He felt cold, and piled his overcoats upon the bed, as though his mental isolation involved a physical effect as well. Switching off the light by the door, he was in the act of crossing the floor in the darkness when a sound beneath the window caught his ear. Outside there were voices talking. The roar of falling water made them indistinct, yet he was sure they were voices, and that one of them he knew. He stopped still to listen. He heard his own name uttered—"John Limasson." They ceased. He stood a moment shivering on the boards, then crawled into bed beneath the heavy clothing. But in the act of settling down they began again. He raised himself again hurriedly to listen. What little wind there was passed in that moment down the valley, carrying off the roar of falling water; and into the moment's space of silence dropped fragments of definite sentences:

"They are close, you say—close down upon the world?" It was the voice of the priest surely.

"For days they have been passing," was the answer—a rough, deep tone that might have been a peasant's, and a kind of fear in it, "for all my flocks are scattered."

"The signs are sure? You know them?"

"Tumult," was the answer in much lower

tones. "There has been tumult in the mountains. . . ."

There was a break then, as though the voices sank too low to be heard. Two broken fragments came next, end of a question—beginning of an answer.

" . . . the opportunity of a lifetime? "

" . . . if he goes of his own free will, success is sure. For acceptance is . . . "

And the wind, returning, bore back the sound of the falling water, so that Limasson heard no more. . . .

An indefinable emotion stirred in him as he turned over to sleep. He stuffed his ears lest he should hear more. He was aware of a sinking of the heart that was inexplicable. What in the world were they talking about, these two? What was the meaning of these disjointed phrases? There lay behind them a grave significance almost solemn. That "tumult in the mountains" was somehow ominous, its suggestion terrible and mighty. He felt disturbed, uncomfortable, the first emotion that had stirred in him for days. The numbness melted before its faint awakening. Conscience was in it—he felt vague prickings—but it was deeper far than conscience. Somewhere out of sight, in a region life had as yet not plumbed, the words sank down and vibrated like pedal notes. They rumbled away into the night of undecipherable things. And, though explanation failed him, he felt they had reference somehow to the morrow's expedition: how, what,

wherefore, he knew not; his name had been spoken—then these curious sentences; that was all. Yet to-morrow's expedition, what was it but an expedition of impersonal kind, not even planned by himself? Merely his own plan taken and altered by others—made over? His personal business, his personal life, were not really in it at all.

The thought startled him a moment. He had no personal life . . .

Struggling with sleep, his brain played the endless game of disentanglement without winning a single point, while the under-mind in him looked on and smiled—because it *knew*. Then, suddenly, a great peace fell over him. Exhaustion brought it, perhaps. He fell asleep; and next moment, it seemed, he was aware of a thundering at the door and an unwelcome growling voice, "*'s ist bald ein Uhr, Herr! Aufstehen!*"

Rising at such an hour, unless the heart be in it, is a sordid and depressing business; Limasson dressed without enthusiasm, conscious that thought and feeling were exactly where he had left them on going to sleep. The same confusion and bewilderment were in him; also the same deep, solemn emotion stirred by the whispering voices. Only long habit enabled him to attend to detail and ensured that nothing was forgotten. He felt heavy and oppressed, a kind of anxiety about him; the routine of preparation he followed gravely, utterly untouched by the customary joy: it was mechanical.

Yet through it ran the old familiar sense of ritual, due to the practice of so many years, that cleansing of mind and body for a big Ascent—like initiatory rites that once had been as important to him as those of some priest who approached the worship of his deity in the temples of ancient time. He performed the ceremony with the same care as though no ghost of vanished faith still watched him, beckoning from the air as formerly. . . . His knapsack carefully packed, he took his ice-axe from beside the bed, turned out the light, and went down the creaking wooden stairs in stockinged feet, lest his heavy boots should waken the other sleepers. And in his head still rang the phrase he had fallen asleep on—as though just uttered:

“The signs are sure; for days they have been passing—close down upon the world. The flocks are scattered. There has been tumult—tumult in the mountains.” The other fragments he had forgotten. But who were “they”? And why did the word bring a chill of awe into his blood?

And as the words rolled through him Limason felt tumult in his thoughts and feelings too. There had been tumult in his life, and all his joys were scattered—joys that hitherto had fed his days. The signs were sure. Something was close down upon his little world—passing—sweeping. He felt a touch of terror.

Outside in the fresh darkness of very early morning the strangers stood waiting for him. Rather, they seemed to arrive in the same instant as himself, equally punctual. The clock

in the church tower sounded one. They exchanged low greetings, remarked that the weather promised to hold good, and started off in single file over soaking meadows toward the first belt of forest. The porter—mere peasant, unfamiliar of face and not connected with the hotel—led the way with a hurricane lantern. The air was marvellously sweet and fragrant. In the sky overhead the stars shone in their thousands. Only the noise of falling water from the heights and the regular thud of their heavy boots broke the stillness. And black against the sky towered the enormous pyramid of the Tour du Néant they meant to conquer.

Perhaps the most delightful portion of a big ascent is the beginning in the scented darkness while the thrill of possible conquest lies still far off. The hours stretch themselves queerly; last night's sunset might be days ago; sunrise and the brilliance coming seem in another week, part of dim futurity like children's holidays. It is difficult to realize that this biting cold before the dawn, and the blazing heat to come, both belong to the same to-day.

There were no sounds as they toiled slowly up the zigzag path through the first fifteen hundred feet of pine-woods; no one spoke; the clink of nails and ice-axe points against the stones was all they heard. For the roar of water was felt rather than heard; it beat against the ears and the skin of the whole body at once. The deeper notes were below them now in the sleeping valley; the shriller ones sounded far

above, where streams just born out of ponderous snow-beds tinkled sharply. . . .

The change came delicately. The stars turned a shade less brilliant, a softness in them as of human eyes that say farewell. Between the highest branches the sky grew visible. A sighing air smoothed all their crests one way; moss, earth, and open spaces brought keen perfumes; and the little human procession, leaving the forest, stepped out into the vastness of the world above the tree-line. They paused while the porter stooped to put his lantern out. In the eastern sky was colour. The peaks and crags rushed closer.

Was it the Dawn? Limasson turned his eyes from the height of sky where the summits pierced a path for the coming day to the faces of his companions, pale and wan in the early twilight. How small, how insignificant they seemed amid this hungry emptiness of desolation. The stupendous cliffs fled past them, led by headstrong peaks crowned with eternal snows. Thin lines of cloud, trailing half-way up precipice and ridge, seemed like the swish of movement—as though he caught the earth turning as she raced through space. The four of them, timid riders on the gigantic saddle, clung for their lives against her titan ribs, while currents of some majestic life swept up at them from every side. He drew deep draughts of the rarefied air into his lungs. It was very cold. Avoiding the pallid, insignificant faces of his companions, he pretended interest in the porter's operations; he stared fixedly on the ground. It seemed

twenty minutes before the flame was extinguished and the lantern fastened to the pack behind. This Dawn was unlike any he had seen before.

For, in reality, all the while, Limasson was trying to bring order out of the extraordinary thoughts and feelings that had possessed him during the slow forest ascent, and the task was not crowned with much success. The Plan, made by others, had taken charge of him, he felt; and he had thrown the reins of personal will and interest loosely upon its steady gait. He had abandoned himself carelessly to what might come. Knowing that he was leader of the expedition, he yet had suffered the porter to go first, taking his own place as it was appointed to him, behind the younger man, but before the priest. In this order they had plodded, as only experienced climbers plod, for hours without a rest, until half-way up a change had taken place. He had wished it, and instantly it was effected. The priest moved past him, while his companion dropped to the rear—the companion who for ever stumbled in his speed, whereas the older man climbed surely, confidently. And thereafter Limasson walked more easily—as though the relative positions of the three were of importance somehow. The steep ascent of smothering darkness through the woods became less arduous. He was glad to have the younger man behind him.

For the impression had strengthened as they climbed in silence that this ascent pertained to some significant Ceremony, and the idea had

grown insistently, almost stealthily, upon him. The movements of himself and his companions, especially the positions each occupied relatively to the other, established some kind of intimacy that resembled speech, suggesting even question and answer. And the entire performance, while occupying hours by his watch, it seemed to him more than once, had been in reality briefer than the flash of a passing thought, so that he saw it within himself—pictorially. He thought of a picture worked in colours upon a strip of elastic. Someone pulled the strip, and the picture stretched. Or someone released it again, and the picture flew back, reduced to a mere stationary speck. All happened in a single speck of time.

And the little change of position, apparently so trivial, gave point to this singular notion working in his under-mind—that this ascent was a ritual and a ceremony as in older days, its significance approaching revelation, however, for the first time—now. Without language, this stole over him; no words could quite describe it. For it came to him that these three formed a unit, himself being in some fashion yet the acknowledged principal, the leader. The labouring porter had no place in it, for this first toiling through the darkness was a preparation, and when the actual climb began he would disappear, while Limasson himself went first. This idea that they took part together in a Ceremony established itself firmly in him, with the added wonder that, though so often done,

he performed it now for the first time with full comprehension, knowledge, truth. Empty of personal desire, indifferent to an ascent that formerly would have thrilled his heart with ambition and delight, he understood that climbing had ever been a ritual for his soul and of his soul, and that power must result from its sincere accomplishment. It was a symbolical ascent.

In words this did not come to him. He felt it, never criticizing. That is, he neither rejected nor accepted. It stole most sweetly, grandly, over him. It floated into him while he climbed, yet so convincingly that he had felt his relative position must be changed. The younger man held too prominent a post, or at least a wrong one—in advance. Then, after the change, effected mysteriously as though all recognized it, this line of certainty increased, and there came upon him the big, strange knowledge that all life is a Ceremony on a giant scale, and that by performing the movements accurately, with sincere fidelity, there may come—knowledge. There was gravity in him from that moment.

This ran in his mind with certainty. Though his thought assumed no form of little phrases, his brain yet furnished detailed statements that clinched the marvellous thing with simile and incident which daily life might apprehend: That knowledge arises from action; that to do the thing invites the teaching and explains it. Action, moreover, is symbolical; a group of men, a family, an entire nation, engaged in

those daily movements which are the working out of their destiny, perform a Ceremony which is in direct relation somewhere to the pattern of greater happenings which are the teachings of the Gods. Let the body imitate, reproduce—in a bedroom, in a wood, anywhere—the movements of the stars, and the meaning of those stars shall sink down into the heart. The movements constitute a script, a language. To mimic the gestures of a stranger is to understand his mood, his point of view—to establish a grave and solemn intimacy. Temples are everywhere, for the entire earth is a temple, and the body, House of Royalty, is the biggest temple of them all. To ascertain the pattern its movements trace in daily life *could* be to determine the relation of that particular ceremony to the Cosmos, and so learn power. The entire system of Pythagoras, he realized, could be taught without a single word—by movements; and in everyday life even the commonest act and vulgarest movement are part of some big Ceremony—a message from the Gods. Ceremony, in a word, is three-dimensional language, and action, therefore, is the language of the Gods. The Gods he had denied were speaking to him . . . passing with tumult close across his broken life. . . . Their passage it was, indeed, that had caused the breaking!

In this cryptic, condensed fashion the great fact came over him—that he and these other two, here and now, took part in some great Ceremony of whose ultimate object as yet he was

in ignorance. The impact with which it dropped upon his mind was tremendous. He realized it most fully when he stepped from the darkness of the forest and entered the expanse of glimmering, early light; up till this moment his mind was being prepared only, whereas now he knew. The innate desire to worship which all along had been his, the momentum his religious temperament had acquired during forty years, the yearning to have proof, in a word, that the Gods he once acknowledged were really true, swept back upon him with that violent reaction which denial had aroused.

He wavered where he stood. . . .

Looking about him, then, while the others rearranged burdens the returning porter now discarded, he perceived the astonishing beauty of the time and place, feeling it soak into him as by the very pores of his skin. From all sides this beauty rushed upon him. Some radiant, wingèd sense of wonder sped past him through the silent air. A thrill of ecstasy ran down every nerve. The hair of his head stood up. It was far from unfamiliar to him, this sight of the upper mountain world awakening from its sleep of the summer night, but never before had he stood shuddering thus at its exquisite cold glory, nor felt its significance as now, so mysteriously *within himself*. Some transcendent power that held sublimity was passing across this huge desolate plateau, far more majestic than the mere sunrise among mountains he had so often witnessed. There was Movement.

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He understood why he had seen his companions insignificant. Again he shivered and looked about him, touched by a solemnity that held deep awe.

Personal life, indeed, was wrecked, destroyed, but something greater was on the way. His fragile alliance with a spiritual world was strengthened. He realized his own past insolence. He became afraid.

III

The treeless plateau, littered with enormous boulders, stretched for miles to right and left, grey in the dusk of very early morning. Behind him dropped thick guardian pine-woods into the sleeping valley that still detained the darkness of the night. Here and there lay patches of deep snow, gleaming faintly through thin, rising mist; singing streams of icy water spread everywhere among the stones, soaking the coarse rough grass that was the only sign of vegetation. No life was visible; nothing stirred; nor anywhere was movement, but of the quiet trailing mist and of his own breath that drifted past his face like smoke. Yet through the splendid stillness there *was* movement; that sense of absolute movement which results in stillness—it was owing to the stillness that he became aware of it—so vast, indeed, that only immobility could express it. Thus, on the calmest day in summer, may the headlong rushing of the earth through space seem more

real than when the tempest shakes the trees and water on its surface; or great machinery turn with such vertiginous velocity that it appears steady to the deceived function of the eye. For it was not through the eye that this solemn Movement made itself known, but rather through a massive sensation that owned his entire body as its organ. Within the league-long amphitheatre of enormous peaks and precipices that enclosed the plateau, piling themselves upon the horizon, Limasson felt the outline of a Ceremony extended. The pulses of its grandeur poured into him where he stood. Its vast design was knowable because they themselves had traced—were even then tracing—its earthly counterpart in little. And the awe in him increased.

“This light is false. We have an hour yet before the true dawn,” he heard the younger man say lightly. “The summits still are ghostly. Let us enjoy the sensation, and see what we can make of it.”

And Limasson, looking up startled from his reverie, saw that the far-away heights and towers indeed were heavy with shadow, faint still with the light of stars. It seemed to him they bowed their awful heads and that their stupendous shoulders lowered. They drew together, shutting out the world.

“True,” said his companion, “and the upper snows still wear the spectral shine of night. But let us now move faster, for we travel very light. The sensations you propose will but delay and weaken us.”

He handed a share of the burdens to his companion and to Limasson. Slowly they all moved forward, and the mountains shut them in.

And two things Limasson noted then, as he shouldered his heavier pack and led the way: first, that he suddenly knew their destination though its purpose still lay hidden; and, secondly, that the porter's leaving before the ascent proper began signified finally that ordinary climbing was not their real objective. Also—the dawn was a lifting of inner veils from off his mind, rather than a brightening of the visible earth due to the nearing sun. Thick darkness, indeed, draped this enormous, lonely amphitheatre where they moved.

"You lead us well," said the priest a few feet behind him, as he picked his way unfalteringly among the boulders and the streams.

"Strange that I do so," replied Limasson in a low tone, "for the way is new to me, and the darkness grows instead of lessening." The language seemed hardly of his choosing. He spoke and walked as in a dream.

Far in the rear the voice of the younger man called plaintively after them:

"You go so fast I can't keep up with you," and again he stumbled and dropped his ice-axe among the rocks. He seemed for ever stooping to drink the icy water, or clambering off the trail to test the patches of snow as to quality and depth. "You're missing all the excitement," he cried repeatedly. "There are a hundred pleasures and sensations by the way."

They paused a moment for him to overtake them; he came up panting and exhausted, making remarks about the fading stars, the wind upon the heights, new routes he longed to try up dangerous couloirs, about everything, it seemed, except the work in hand. There was eagerness in him, the kind of excitement that saps energy and wastes the nervous force, threatening a probable collapse before the arduous object is attained.

"Keep to the thing in hand," replied the priest sternly. "We are not really going fast; it is you who are scattering yourself to no purpose. It wears us all. We must husband our resources," and he pointed significantly to the pyramid of the Tour du Néant that gleamed above them at an incredible altitude.

"We are here to amuse ourselves; life is a pleasure, a sensation, or it is nothing," grumbled his companion; but there was a gravity in the tone of the older man that discouraged argument and made resistance difficult. The other arranged his pack for the tenth time, twisting his axe through an ingenious scheme of straps and string, and fell silently into line behind his leaders. Limasson moved on again . . . and the darkness at length began to lift. Far overhead, at first, the snowy summits shone with a hue less spectral; a delicate pink spread softly from the east; there was a freshening of the chilly wind; then suddenly the highest peak that topped the others by a thousand feet of soaring rock stepped sharply into sight, half golden and half

rose. At the same instant the vast Movement of the entire scene slowed down; there came one or two terrific gusts of wind in quick succession; a roar like an avalanche of falling stones boomed distantly—and Limasson stopped dead and held his breath.

For something blocked the way before him, something he knew he could not pass. Gigantic and unformed, it seemed part of the architecture of the desolate waste about him, while yet it bulked there, enormous in the trembling dawn, as belonging neither to plain nor mountain. Suddenly it was there, where a moment before had been mere emptiness of air. Its massive outline shifted into visibility as though it had risen from the ground. He stood stock-still. A cold that was not of this world turned him rigid in his tracks. A few yards behind him the priest had halted too. Farther in the rear they heard the stumbling tread of the younger man, and the faint calling of his voice—a feeble, broken sound as of a man whom sudden fear distressed to helplessness.

“We’re off the track, and I’ve lost my way,” the words came on the still air. “My axe is gone . . . let us put on the rope! . . . Hark! Do you hear that roar?” And then a sound as though he came slowly groping on his hands and knees.

“You have exhausted yourself too soon,” the priest answered sternly. “Stay where you are and rest, for we go no farther. This is the place we sought.”

There was in his tone a kind of ultimate

solemnity that for a moment turned Limasson's attention from the great obstacle that blocked his farther way. The darkness lifted veil by veil, not gradually, but by a series of leaps as when someone inexpertly turns a wick. He perceived, then, that not a single Grandeur loomed in front, but that others of similar kind, some huger than the first, stood all about him, forming an enclosing circle that hemmed him in.

Then, with a start, he recovered himself. Equilibrium and common sense returned. The trick that sight had played upon him, assisted by the rarefied atmosphere of the heights and by the witchery of dawn, was no uncommon one, after all. The long straining of the eyes to pick the way in an uncertain light so easily deceives perspective. Delusion ever follows abrupt change of focus. These shadowy encircling forms were but the rampart of still distant precipices whose giant walls framed the tremendous amphitheatre to the sky.

Their closeness was a mere gesture of the dusk and distance.

The shock of the discovery produced an instant's unsteadiness in him that brought bewilderment. He straightened up, raised his head, and looked about him. The cliffs, it seemed to him, shifted back instantly to their accustomed places, as though after all they *had* been close; there was a reeling among the topmost crags; they balanced fearfully, then stood still against a sky already faintly crimson. The roar he heard, that might well have seemed the

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tumult of their hurrying speed, was in reality but the wind of dawn that rushed against their ribs, beating the echoes out with angry wings. And the lines of trailing mist, streaking the air like proofs of rapid motion, merely coiled and floated in the empty spaces.

He turned to the priest, who had moved up beside him.

"How strange," he said, "is this beginning of new light. My sight went all astray for a passing moment. I thought the mountains stood right across my path. And when I looked up just now it seemed they all ran back." His voice was small and lost in the great listening air.

The man looked fixedly at him. He had removed his slouch hat, hot with the long ascent, and as he answered, a long thin shadow flitted across his features. A breadth of darkness dropped about them. It was as though a mask were forming. The face that now was covered had been—naked. He was so long in answering that Limasson heard his mind sharpening the sentence like a pencil.

He spoke very slowly. "*They* move, perhaps even as *Their* powers move, and *Their* minutes are our years. *Their* passage ever is in tumult. There is disorder then among the affairs of men; there is confusion in their minds. There may be ruin and disaster, but out of the wreckage shall issue strong, fresh growth. For like a sea, *They* pass."

There was in his mien a grandeur that seemed borrowed marvellously from the mountains. His voice was grave and deep; he made no sign

or gesture; and in his manner was a curious steadiness that breathed through the language a kind of sacred prophecy.

Long, thundering gusts of wind passed distantly across the precipices as he spoke. The same moment, expecting apparently no rejoinder to his strange utterance, he stooped and began to unpack his knapsack. The change from the sacerdotal language to this commonplace and practical detail was singularly bewildering.

"It is the time to rest," he added, "and the time to eat. Let us prepare." And he drew out several small packets and laid them in a row upon the ground. Awe deepened over Limasson as he watched, and with it a great wonder too. For the words seemed ominous, as though this man, upon the floor of some vast Temple, said: "Let us prepare a sacrifice . . . !" There flashed into him, out of depths that had hitherto concealed it, a lightning clue that hinted at explanation of the entire strange proceeding—of the abrupt meeting with the strangers, the impulsive acceptance of their project for the great ascent, their grave behaviour as though it were a Ceremonial of immense design, his change of position, the bewildering tricks of sight, and the solemn language, finally, of the older man that corroborated what he himself had deemed at first illusion. In a flying second of time this all swept through him—and with it the sharp desire to turn aside, retreat, to run away.

Noting the movement, or perhaps divining the

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emotion prompting it, the priest looked up quickly. In his tone was a coldness that seemed as though this scene of wintry desolation uttered words:

"You have come too far to think of turning back. It is not possible. You stand now at the gates of birth—and death. All that might hinder you have so bravely cast aside. Be brave now to the end."

And, as Limasson heard the words, there dropped suddenly into him a new and awful insight into humanity, a power that unerringly discovered the spiritual necessities of others, and therefore of himself. With a shock he realized that the younger man—who had accompanied them with increasing difficulty as they climbed higher and higher—was but a shadow of reality. Like the porter, he was but an encumbrance who impeded progress. And he turned his eyes to search the desolate landscape.

"You will not find him," said his companion, "for he is gone. Never, unless you weakly call, shall you see him again, nor desire to hear his voice." And Limasson realized that in his heart he had all the while disapproved of the man, disliked him for his theatrical fondness of sensation and effect, more, that he had even hated and despised him. Starvation might crawl upon him where he had fallen and eat his life away before he would stir a finger to save him.

It was with the older man he now had dreadful business in hand.

"I am glad," he answered, "for in the end he must have proved my death—our death!"

And they drew closer round the little circle of food the priest had laid upon the rocky ground, an intimate understanding linking them together in a sympathy that completed Limasson's bewilderment. There was bread, he saw, and there was salt; there was also a little flask of deep red wine. In the centre of the circle was a miniature fire of sticks the priest had collected from the bushes of wild rhododendron. The smoke rose upward in a thin blue line. It did not even quiver, so profound was the surrounding stillness of the mountain air, but far away among the precipices ran the boom of falling water, and behind it again the muffled roar as of peaks and snow-fields that swept with a rolling thunder through the heavens.

"They are passing," the priest said in a low voice, "and They know that you are here. You have now the opportunity of a lifetime; for, if you yield acceptance of your own free will, success is sure. You stand before the gates of birth and death. They offer you life."

"Yet . . . I denied Them!" He murmured it below his breath.

"Denial is evocation. You called to them, and They have come. The sacrifice of your little personal life is all They ask. Be brave—and yield it."

He took the bread as he spoke, and, breaking it in three pieces, he placed one before Limasson, one before himself, and the third he laid upon

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the flame, which first blackened and then consumed it.

"Eat it and understand," he said, "for it is the nourishment that shall revive your fading life."

Next with the salt he did the same. Then raising the flask of wine he put it to his lips, offering it afterwards to his companion. When both had drunk there still remained the greater part of the contents. He lifted the vessel with both hands reverently toward the sky. He stood upright.

"The blood of your personal life I offer to Them in your name. By the renunciation which seems to you as death shall you pass through the gates of birth to the life of freedom beyond. For the ultimate sacrifice that They ask of you is—this."

And bending low before the distant heights he poured the wine upon the rocky ground.

For a period of time Limasson found no means of measuring, so terrible were the emotions in his heart, the priest remained in this attitude of worship and obeisance. The tumult in the mountains ceased. An absolute hush dropped down upon the world. There seemed a pause in the inner history of the universe itself. All waited—till he rose again. And, when he did so, the mask that had for hours now been spreading across his features was accomplished. The eyes gazed sternly down into his own. Limasson looked—and recognized. He stood face to face with the man whom he knew best of all others in the world . . . himself.

There had been death. There had also been that recovery of splendour which is birth and resurrection.

And the sun that moment, with the sudden surprise that mountains only know, rushed clear above the heights, bathing the landscape and the standing figure with a stainless glory. Into the vast Temple where he knelt, as into that greater inner Temple which is mankind's true House of Royalty, there poured the completing Presence which is—Light.

“For in this way, and in this way only, shall you pass from death to life,” sang a chanting voice he recognized also now for the first time as indubitably his own.

It was marvellous. But the birth of light is ever marvellous. It was anguish; but the pangs of resurrection since time began have been accomplished by the sweetness of fierce pain. For the majority still lie in the pre-natal stage, unborn, unconscious of a definite spiritual existence. In the womb they grope and stifle, depending ever upon another. Denial is ever the call to life, a protest against continued darkness for deliverance. Yet birth is the ruin of all that has hitherto been depended on. There comes then that standing alone which at first seems desolate isolation. The tumult of destruction precedes release.

Limasson rose to his feet, stood with difficulty upright, looked about him from the figure so close now at his side to the snowy summit of that Tour du Néant he would never climb.

The roar and thunder of *Their* passage was resumed. It seemed the mountains reeled.

"They are passing," sang the voice that was beside him and within him too, "but They have known you, and your offering is accepted. When They come close upon the world there is ever wreckage and disaster in the affairs of men. They bring disorder and confusion into the mind, a confusion that seems final, a disorder that seems to threaten death. For there is tumult in Their Presence, and apparent chaos that seems the abandonment of order. Out of this vast ruin, then, there issues life in new design. The dislocation is its entrance, the dishevelment its strength. There has been birth. . . ."

The sunlight dazzled his eyes. That distant roar, like a wind, came close and swept his face. An icy air, as from a passing star, breathed over him.

"Are you prepared?" he heard.

He knelt again. Without a sign of hesitation or reluctance, he bared his chest to the sun and wind. The flash came swiftly, instantly, descending into his heart with unerring aim. He saw the gleam in the air, he felt the fiery impact of the blow, he even saw the stream gush forth and sink into the rocky ground, far redder than the wine. . . .

.

He gasped for breath a moment, staggered, reeled, collapsed . . . and within the moment, so

quickly did all happen, he was aware of hands that supported him and helped him to his feet. But he was too weak to stand. They carried him up to bed. The porter, and the man who had reached across him for the matches five minutes before, intending conversation, stood, one at his feet and the other at his head. As he passed through the vestibule of the hotel he saw the people staring, and in his hand he crumpled up the unopened letters he had received so short a time ago.

"I really think—I can manage alone," he thanked them. "If you will set me down I can walk! I felt dizzy for a moment."

"The heat in the hall——" the gentleman began in a quiet, sympathetic voice.

They left him standing on the stairs, watching a moment to see that he had quite recovered. Limasson walked up the two flights to his room without faltering. The momentary dizziness had passed. He felt quite himself again, strong, confident, able to stand alone, able to move forward, able to *climb*.

From "Incredible Adventures"

CHINESE MAGIC

DR OWEN FRANCIS felt a sudden wave of pleasure and admiration sweep over him as he saw her enter the room. He was in the act of going out; in fact, he had already said good-bye to his hostess, glad to make his escape from the chattering throng, when the tall and graceful young woman glided past him. Her carriage was superb; she had black eyes with a twinkling happiness in them; her mouth was exquisite. Round her neck, in spite of the warm afternoon, she wore a soft thing of fur or feathers; and as she brushed by to shake the hand he had just shaken himself, the tail of this touched his very cheek. Their eyes met fair and square. He felt as though her eyes also touched him.

Changing his mind, he lingered another ten minutes, chatting with various ladies he did not in the least remember, but who remembered him. He did not, of course, desire to exchange banalities with these other ladies, yet did so gallantly enough. If they found him absent-minded, they excused him since he was the famous mental specialist whom everybody was proud to know. And all the time his eyes never left the tall graceful figure that allured him almost to the point of casting a spell upon him.

His first impression deepened as he watched. He was aware of excitement, curiosity, longing; there was a touch even of exaltation in him; yet he took no steps to seek the introduction which was easily enough procurable. He checked himself, if with an effort. Several times their eyes met across the crowded room; he dared to believe—he felt instinctively—that his interest was returned. Indeed, it was more than instinct, for she was certainly aware of his presence, and he even caught her indicating him to a woman she spoke with, and evidently asking who he was. Once he half bowed, and once, in spite of himself, he went so far as to smile, and there came, he was sure, a faint, delicious brightening of the eyes in answer. There was, he fancied, a look of yearning in the face. The young woman charmed him inexpressibly; the very way she moved delighted him. Yet at last he slipped out of the room without a word, without an introduction, without even knowing her name. He chose his moment when her back was turned. It was characteristic of him.

For Owen Francis had ever regarded marriage, for himself at least, as a disaster that could be avoided. He was in love with his work, and his work was necessary to humanity. Others might perpetuate the race, but he must heal it. He had come to regard love as the bait wherewith Nature lays her trap to fulfil her own ends. A man in love was a man enjoying a delusion, a deluded man. In his case, and he was nearing forty-five, the theory had worked admirably,

and the dangerous exception that proved it had as yet not troubled him.

"It's come at last—I do believe," he thought to himself, as he walked home, a new tumultuous emotion in his blood; "the exception, quite possibly, has come at last. I wonder. . . ."

And it seemed he said it to the tall graceful figure by his side, who turned up dark eyes smilingly to meet his own, and whose lips repeated softly his last two words "I wonder. . . ."

The experience, being new to him, was baffling. A part of his nature, long dormant, received the authentic thrill that pertains actually to youth. He was a man of chaste, abstemious custom. The reaction was vehement. That dormant part of him became obstreperous. He thought of his age, his appearance, his prospects; he looked thirty-eight, he was not unhandsome, his position was secure, even remarkable. That gorgeous young woman—he called her gorgeous—haunted him. Never could he forget that face, those eyes. It was extraordinary—he had left her there unspoken to, unknown, when an introduction would have been the simplest thing in the world.

"But it still is," he reflected. And the reflection filled his being with a flood of joy.

He checked himself again. Not so easily is established habit routed. He felt instinctively that, at last, he had met his mate; if he followed it up, he was a man in love, a lost man enjoying a delusion, a deluded man. But the way she had looked at him! That air of intuitive

invitation which not even the sweetest modesty could conceal! He felt an immense confidence in himself; also he felt oddly sure of her.

The presence of that following figure, already precious, came with him into his house, even into his study at the back where he sat over a number of letters by the open window. The pathetic little London garden showed its pitiful patch. The lilac had faded, but a smell of roses entered. The sun was just behind the buildings opposite, and the garden lay soft and warm in summer shadows.

He read and tossed aside the letters; one only interested him, from Edward Farque, whose journey to China had interrupted a friendship of long standing. Edward Farque's work on Eastern art and philosophy, on Chinese painting and Chinese thought in particular, had made its mark. He was an authority. He was to be back about this time, and his friend smiled with pleasure. "‘Dear old unpractical dreamer,’ as I used to call him," he mused. "He's a success, anyhow!" And as he mused the presence that sat beside him came a little closer, yet at the same time faded. Not that he forgot her—that was impossible—but that just before opening the letter from his friend he had come to a decision. He had definitely made up his mind to seek acquaintance. The reality replaced the remembered substitute.

As the newspapers may have warned you [ran the familiar and kinky writing], I am back in

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England after what the scribes term my ten years of exile in Cathay. I have taken a little house in Hampstead for six months, and am just settling in. Come to us to-morrow night and let me prove it to you. Come to dinner. We shall have much to say; we both are ten years wiser. You know how glad I shall be to see my old-time critic and disparager, but let me add frankly that I want to ask you a few professional, or, rather, technical, questions. So prepare yourself to come as doctor and as friend. I am writing, as the papers said truthfully, a treatise on Chinese thought. But—don't shy!—it is about Chinese Magic that I want your technical advice [the last two words were substituted for "professional wisdom," which had been crossed out] and the benefit of your vast experience. So come, old friend, come quickly, and come hungry! I'll feed your body as you shall feed my mind.

Yours,

EDWARD FARQUE

P.S.—The coming of a friend from a far-off land—is not this true joy?

Dr Francis laid down the letter with a pleased anticipatory chuckle, and it was the touch in the final sentence that amused him. In spite of being an authority, Farque was clearly the same fanciful, poetic dreamer as of old. He quoted Confucius as in other days. The firm but kinky writing had not altered either. The only sign of novelty he noticed was the use of scented paper, for a faint and pungent aroma clung to the big quarto sheet.

"A Chinese habit, doubtless," he decided, sniffing it with a puzzled air of disapproval. Yet it had nothing in common with the scented sachets some ladies use too lavishly, so that even the air of the street is polluted by their passing for a dozen yards. He was familiar with every kind of perfumed note-paper used in London, Paris, and Constantinople. This one was different. It was delicate and penetrating for all its faintness, pleasurable too. He rather liked it, and while annoyed that he could not name it, he sniffed at the letter several times, as though it were a flower.

"I'll go," he decided at once, and wrote an acceptance then and there. He went out and posted it. He meant to prolong his walk into the Park, taking his chief preoccupation, the face, the eyes, the figure, with him. Already he was composing the note of inquiry to Mrs Malleson, his hostess of the tea-party, the note whose willing answer should give him the name, the address, the means of introduction he had now determined to secure. He visualized that note of inquiry, seeing it in his mind's eye; only, for some odd reason, he saw the kinky writing of Farque instead of his own more elegant script. Association of ideas and emotions readily explained this. Two new and unexpected interests had entered his life on the same day, and within half an hour of each other. What he could not so readily explain, however, was that two words in his friend's ridiculous letter, and in that kinky writing, stood out sharply

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from the rest. As he slipped his envelope into the mouth of the red pillar-box they shone vividly in his mind. These two words were "Chinese Magic."

II

It was the warmth of his friend's invitation as much as his own state of inward excitement that decided him suddenly to anticipate his visit by twenty-four hours. It would clear his judgment and help his mind if he spent the evening at Hampstead rather than alone with his own thoughts. "A dose of China," he thought, with a smile, "will do me good. Edward won't mind. I'll telephone."

He left the Park soon after six o'clock and acted upon his impulse. The connexion was bad, the wire buzzed and popped and crackled; talk was difficult; he did not hear properly. The Professor had not yet come in, apparently. Francis said he would come up anyhow on the chance.

"Velly pleased," said the voice in his ear, as he rang off.

Going into his study, he drafted the note that should result in the introduction that was now, it appeared, the chief object of his life. The way this woman with the black, twinkling eyes obsessed him was—he admitted it with joy—extraordinary. The draft he put in his pocket, intending to rewrite it next morning, and all the way up to Hampstead Heath the gracious

figure glided silently beside him, the eyes were ever present, his cheek still glowed where the feather boa had touched his skin. Edward Farque remained in the background. In fact, it was on the very door-step, having rung the bell, that Francis realized he must pull himself together. "I've come to see old Farque," he reminded himself, with a smile. "I've got to be interested in him and his, and, probably, for an hour or two, to talk Chinese——" when the door opened noiselessly, and he saw facing him, with a grin of celestial welcome on his yellow face, a Chinaman.

"Oh!" he said, with a start. He had not expected a Chinese servant.

"Velly pleased," the man bowed him in.

Dr Francis stared round him with astonishment he could not conceal. A great golden idol faced him in the hall, its gleaming visage blazing out of a sort of miniature golden palanquin, with a grin, half dignified, half cruel. Fully double human size, it blocked the way, looking so life-like that it might have moved to meet him without too great a shock to what seemed possible. It rested on a throne with four massive legs, carved, the doctor saw, with serpents, dragons, and mythical monsters generally. Round it on every side were other things in keeping. Name them he could not, describe them he did not try. He summed them up in one word—China: pictures, weapons, cloths and tapestries, bells, gongs, and figures of every sort and kind imaginable.

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Being ignorant of Chinese matters, Dr Francis stood and looked about him in a mental state of some confusion. He had the feeling that he had entered a Chinese temple, for there was a faint smell of incense hanging about the house that was, to say the least, un-English. Nothing English, in fact, was visible at all. The matting on the floor, the swinging curtains of bamboo beads that replaced the customary doors, the silk draperies and pictured cushions, the bronze and ivory, the screens hung with fantastic embroideries, everything was Chinese. Hampstead vanished from his thoughts. The very lamps were in keeping, the ancient lacquered furniture as well. The value of what he saw, an expert could have told him, was considerable.

"You likee?" queried the voice at his side.

He had forgotten the servant. He turned sharply.

"Very much; it's wonderfully done," he said. "Makes you feel at home, John, eh?" he added tactfully, with a smile, and was going to ask how long all this preparation had taken, when a voice sounded on the stairs beyond. It was a voice he knew, a note of hearty welcome in its deep tones.

"The coming of a friend from a far-off land, even from Harley Street—is not this true joy?" he heard, and the next minute was shaking the hand of his old and valued friend. The intimacy between them had always been of the truest.

"I almost expected a pigtail," observed

Francis, looking him affectionately up and down, "but, really—why, you've hardly changed at all!"

"Outwardly, not as much, perhaps, as Time expects," was the happy reply, "but inwardly——!" He scanned appreciatively the burly figure of the doctor in his turn. "And I can say the same of you," he declared, still holding his hand tight. "This is a real pleasure, Owen," he went on in his deep voice; "to see you again is a joy to me. Old friends meeting again—there's nothing like it in life, I believe, nothing." He gave the hand another squeeze before he let it go. "And we," he added, leading the way into a room across the hall, "neither of us is a fugitive from life. We take what we can, I mean."

The doctor smiled as he noted the un-English turn of language, and together they entered a sitting-room that was, again, more like some inner chamber of a Chinese temple than a back room in a rented Hampstead house.

"I only knew ten minutes ago that you were coming, my dear fellow," the scholar was saying, as his friend gazed round him with increased astonishment, "or I would have prepared more suitably for your reception. I was out till late. All this"—he waved his hand—"surprises you, of course, but the fact is I have been home some days already, and most of what you see was arranged for me in advance of my arrival. Hence its apparent completion. I say 'apparent,' because, actually, it is far from faith-

fully carried out. Yet to exceed," he added, "is as bad as to fall short."

The doctor watched him while he listened to a somewhat lengthy explanation of the various articles surrounding them. The speaker—he confirmed his first impression—had changed little during the long interval; the same enthusiasm was in him as before, the same fire and dreaminess alternately in the fine grey eyes, the same humour and passion about the mouth, the same free gestures, and the same big voice. Only the lines had deepened on the forehead, and on the fine face the air of thoughtfulness was also deeper. It was Edward Farque as of old, scholar, poet, dreamer and enthusiast, despiser of Western civilization, contemptuous of money, generous and upright, a type of value, an individual.

"You've done well, done splendidly, Edward, old man," said his friend presently, after hearing of Chinese wonders that took him somewhat beyond his depth perhaps. "No one is more pleased than I. I've watched your books. You haven't regretted England, I'll be bound?" he asked.

"The philosopher has no country, in any case," was the reply, steadily given. "But out there I confess I've found my home." He leaned forward, a deeper earnestness in his tone and expression. And into his face, as he spoke, came a glow of happiness. "My heart," he said softly, "is in China."

"I see it is, I see it is," put in the other, conscious that he could not honestly share his

friend's enthusiasm. "And you're fortunate to be free to live where your treasure is," he added after a moment's pause. "You must be a happy man. Your passion amounts to nostalgia, I suspect. Already yearning to get back there, probably?"

Farque gazed at him for some seconds with shining eyes. "You remember the Persian saying, I'm sure," he said. "'You see a man drink, but you do not see his thirst.' Well," he added, laughing happily, "you may see me off in six months' time, but you will not see my happiness."

While he went on talking the doctor glanced round the room, marvelling still at the exquisite taste of everything, the neat arrangement, the perfect matching of form and colour. A woman might have done this thing, occurred to him, as the haunting figure shifted deliciously into the foreground of his mind again. The thought of her had been momentarily replaced by all he heard and saw. She now returned, filling him with joy, anticipation, and enthusiasm. Presently, when it was his turn to talk, he would tell his friend about this new, unimagined happiness that had burst upon him like a sunrise. Presently, but not just yet. He remembered, too, with a passing twinge of possible boredom to come, that there must be some delay before his own heart could unburden itself in its turn. Farque wanted to ask some professional questions, of course. He had for the moment forgotten that part of the letter in his general interest and astonishment.

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"Happiness, yes . . ." he murmured, aware that his thoughts had wandered and catching at the last word he remembered hearing. "As you said just now in your own queer way—you haven't changed a bit, let me tell you, in your picturesqueness of quotation, Edward!—one must not be fugitive from life; one must seize happiness when and where it offers."

He said it lightly enough, hugging internally his own sweet secret; but he was a little surprised at the earnestness of his friend's rejoinder: "Both of us, I see," came the deep voice, backed by the flash of the far-seeing grey eyes, "have made some progress in the doctrine of life and death." He paused, gazing at the other with sight that was obviously turned inwards upon his own thoughts. "Beauty," he went on presently, his tone even more serious, "has been my lure; yours, Reality. . . ."

"You don't flatter either of us, Edward. That's too exclusive a statement," put in the doctor. He was becoming every minute more and more interested in the workings of his friend's mind. Something about the signs offered eluded his understanding. "Explain yourself, old scholar-poet. I'm a dull, practical mind, remember, and can't keep pace with Chinese subtleties."

"*You've* left out Beauty," was the quiet rejoinder, "while *I* left out Reality. That's neither Chinese nor subtle. It's simply true."

"A bit wholesale, isn't it?" laughed Francis. "A big generalization, rather."

A bright light seemed to illuminate the scholar's face. It was as though an inner lamp was suddenly lit. At the same moment the sound of a soft gong floated in from the hall outside, so soft that the actual strokes were not distinguishable in the wave of musical vibration that reached the ear.

Farque rose to lead the way in to dinner.

"What if I—" he whispered, "have combined the two?" And upon his face was a look of joy that reached down into the other's own full heart with its unexpectedness and wonder. It was the last remark in the world he had looked for. He wondered for a moment whether he interpreted it correctly.

"By Jove . . . !" he exclaimed. "Edward, what d'you mean?"

"You shall hear—after dinner," said Farque, his voice mysterious, his eyes still shining with his inner joy. "I told you I have some questions to ask you—professionally." And they took their seats round an ancient, marvellous table, lit by two swinging lamps of soft green jade, while the Chinese servant waited on them with the silent movements and deft neatness of his imperturbable celestial race.

III

To say that he was bored during the meal were an over-statement of Dr Francis's mental condition, but to say that he was half-bored seemed the literal truth; for one half of him,

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while he ate his steak and savoury and watched Farque manipulating *chou chop suey* and *chou om dong* most cleverly with chop-sticks, was too preoccupied with his own new romance to allow the other half to give its full attention to the conversation.

He had entered the room, however, with a distinct quickening of what may be termed his instinctive and infallible sense of diagnosis. That last remark of his friend's had stimulated him. He was aware of surprise, curiosity, and impatience. Willy-nilly, he began automatically to study him with a profounder interest. Something, he gathered, was not quite as it should be in Edward Farque's mental composition. There was what might be called an elusive emotional disturbance. He began to wonder and to watch.

They talked, naturally, of China and of things Chinese, for the scholar responded to little else, and Francis listened with what sympathy and patience he could muster. Of art and beauty he had hitherto known little, his mind was practical and utilitarian. He now learned that all art was derived from China, where a high, fine, subtle culture had reigned since time immemorial. Older than Egypt was their wisdom. When the Western races were eating one another, before Greece was even heard of, the Chinese had reached a level of knowledge and achievement that few realized. Never had they, even in earliest times, been deluded by anthropomorphic conceptions of the Deity, but perceived in everything the expressions of a

single whole whose vast activities they reverently worshipped. Their contempt for the Western scurry after knowledge, wealth, machinery, was justified, if Farque was worthy of belief. He seemed saturated with Chinese thought, art, philosophy, and his natural bias toward the celestial race had hardened into an attitude to life that had now become ineradicable.

"They deal, as it were, in essences," he declared; "they discern the essence of everything, leaving out the superfluous, the unessential, the trivial. Their pictures alone prove it. Come with me," he concluded, "and see the *Earthly Paradise*, now in the British Museum. It is like Botticelli, but better than anything Botticelli ever did. It was painted"—he paused for emphasis—"600 years B.C."

The wonder of this quiet, ancient civilization, a sense of its depth, its wisdom, grew upon his listener as the enthusiastic poet described its charm and influence upon himself. He willingly allowed the enchantment of the other's Paradise to steal upon his own awakened heart. There was a good deal Francis might have offered by way of criticism and objection, but he preferred on the whole to keep his own views to himself, and to let his friend wander unhindered through the mazes of his passionate evocation. All men, he well knew, needed a dream to carry them through life's disappointments, a dream that they could enter at will and find peace, contentment, happiness. Farque's dream was China.

Why not? It was as good as another, and a man like Farque was entitled to what dream he pleased.

"And their women?" he inquired at last, letting both halves of his mind speak together for the first time.

But he was not prepared for the expression that leaped upon his friend's face at the simple question. Nor for his method of reply. It was no reply, in point of fact. It was simply an attack upon all other types of woman, and upon the white, the English, in particular—their emptiness, their triviality, their want of intuitive imagination, of spiritual grace, of everything, in a word, that should constitute woman a meet companion for man, and a little higher than the angels into the bargain. The doctor listened spellbound. Too humorous to be shocked, he was, at any rate, disturbed by what he heard, displeased a little, too. It threatened too directly his own new tender dream.

Only with the utmost self-restraint did he keep his temper under, and prevent hot words he would have regretted later from tearing his friend's absurd claim into ragged shreds. He was wounded personally as well. Never now could he bring himself to tell his own secret to him. The outburst chilled and disappointed him. But it had another effect—it cooled his judgment. His sense of diagnosis quickened. He divined an *idée fixe*, a mania possibly. His interest deepened abruptly. He watched. He began to look about him with more wary eyes,

and a sense of uneasiness, once the anger passed, stirred in his friendly and affectionate heart.

They had been sitting alone over their port for some considerable time, the servant having long since left the room. The doctor had sought to change the subject many times without much success, when suddenly Farque changed it for him.

"Now," he announced, "I'll tell you something," and Francis guessed that the professional questions were on the way at last. "We must pity the living, remember, and part with the dead. Have you forgotten old Shan-Yu?"

The forgotten name came back to him, the picturesque East End dealer of many years ago. "The old merchant who taught you your first Chinese? I do recall him dimly, now you mention it. You made quite a friend of him, didn't you? He thought very highly of you—ah, it comes back to me now—he offered something or other very wonderful in his gratitude, unless my memory fails me."

"His most valuable possession," Farque went on, a strange look deepening on his face, an expression of mysterious rapture, as it were, and one that Francis recognized and swiftly pigeon-holed in his now attentive mind.

"Which was?" he asked sympathetically. "You told me once, but so long ago that really it's slipped my mind. Something magical, wasn't it?" He watched closely for his friend's reply.

Farque lowered his voice to a whisper almost devotional:

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"The Perfume of the Garden of Happiness," he murmured, with an expression in his eyes as though the mere recollection gave him joy. "'Burn it,' he told me, 'in a brazier; then inhale. You will enter the Valley of a Thousand Temples wherein lies the Garden of Happiness, and there you will meet your Love. You will have seven years of happiness with your Love before the Waters of Separation flow between you. I give this to you who alone of men here have appreciated the wisdom of my land. Follow my body toward the Sunrise. You, an Eastern soul in a barbarian body, will meet your Destiny.'"

The doctor's attention, such is the power of self-interest, quickened amazingly as he heard. His own romance flamed up with power. His friend—it dawned upon him suddenly—loved a woman.

"Come," said Farque, rising quietly, "we will go into the other room, and I will show you what I have shown to but one other in the world before. You are a doctor," he continued, as he led the way to the silk-covered divan where golden dragons swallowed crimson suns, and wonderful jade horses hovered near. "You understand the mind and nerves. States of consciousness you also can explain, and the effect of drugs is, doubtless, known to you." He swung to the heavy curtains that took the place of door, handed a lacquered box of cigarettes to his friend, and lit one himself. "Perfumes, too," he added, "you probably have studied,

with their extraordinary evocative power." He stood in the middle of the room, the green light falling on his interesting and thoughtful face, and for a passing second Francis, watching keenly, observed a change flit over it and vanish. The eyes grew narrow and slid tilted upward, the skin wore a shade of yellow underneath the green from the lamp of jade, the nose slipped back a little, the cheek-bones forward.

"Perfumes," said the doctor, "no. Of perfumes I know nothing, beyond their interesting effect upon the memory. I cannot help you there. But you, I suspect," and he looked up with an inviting sympathy that concealed the close observation underneath, "you yourself, I feel sure, can tell me something of value about them?"

"Perhaps," was the calm reply, "perhaps, for I have smelt the Perfume of the Garden of Happiness, and I have been in the Valley of a Thousand Temples." He spoke with a glow of joy and reverence almost devotional.

The doctor waited in some suspense, while his friend moved toward an inlaid cabinet across the room. More than broad-minded, he was that much rarer thing, an open-minded man, ready at a moment's notice to discard all preconceived ideas, provided new knowledge that necessitated the holocaust were shown to him. At present, none the less, he held very definite views of his own. "Please ask me any questions you like," he added. "All I know is entirely yours, as always." He was aware of suppressed

excitement in his friend that betrayed itself in every word and look and gesture, an excitement intense, and not as yet explained by anything he had seen or heard.

The scholar, meanwhile, had opened a drawer in the cabinet and taken from it a neat little packet tied up with purple silk. He held it with tender, almost loving care, as he came and sat down on the divan beside his friend.

"This," he said, in a tone, again, of something between reverence and worship, "contains what I have to show you first." He slowly unrolled it, disclosing a yet smaller silken bag within, coloured a deep rich orange. There were two vertical columns of writing on it, painted in Chinese characters. The doctor leaned forward to examine them. His friend translated:

"The Perfume of the Garden of Happiness," he read aloud, tracing the letters of the first column with his finger. "The Destroyer of Honourable Homes," he finished, passing to the second, and then proceeded to unwrap the little silken bag. Before it was actually open, however, and the pale shredded material resembling coloured chaff visible to the eyes, the doctor's nostrils had recognized the strange aroma he had first noticed about his friend's letter received earlier in the day. The same soft, penetrating odour, sharply piercing, sweet and delicate, rose to his brain. It stirred at once a deep emotional pleasure in him. Having come to him first when he was aglow with his

own unexpected romance, his mind and heart full of the woman he had just left, that delicious, torturing state revived in him quite naturally. The evocative power of perfume with regard to memory is compelling. A livelier sympathy toward his friend, and toward what he was about to hear, awoke in him spontaneously.

He did not mention the letter, however. He merely leaned over to smell the fragrant perfume more easily.

Farque drew back the open packet instantly, at the same time holding out a warning hand. "Careful," he said gravely, "be careful, my old friend—unless you desire to share the rapture and the risk that have been mine. To enjoy its full effect, true, this dust must be burned in a brazier and its smoke inhaled; but even sniffed, as you now would sniff it, and you are in danger——"

"Of what?" asked Francis, impressed by the other's extraordinary intensity of voice and manner.

"Of Heaven; but, possibly, of Heaven before your time."

IV

The tale that Farque unfolded then had certainly a strange celestial flavour, a glory not of this dull world; and as his friend listened, his interest deepened with every minute, while his bewilderment increased. He watched closely, expert that he was, for clues that might guide his deductions aright, but for all his keen observation

and experience he could detect no inconsistency, no weakness, nothing that betrayed the smallest mental aberration. The origin and nature of what he already decided was an *idée fixe*, a mania, evaded him entirely. This evasion piqued and vexed him; he had heard a thousand tales of similar type before; that this one in particular should baffle his unusual skill touched his pride. Yet he faced the position honestly; he confessed himself baffled until the end of the evening. When he went away, however, he went away satisfied, even forgetful—because a new problem of yet more poignant interest had replaced the first.

“It was after three years out there,” said Farque, “that a sense of my loneliness first came upon me. It came upon me bitterly. My work had not then been recognized; obstacles and difficulties had increased; I felt a failure; I had accomplished nothing. And it seemed to me I had misjudged my capacities, taken a wrong direction, and wasted my life accordingly. For my move to China, remember, was a radical move, and my boats were burnt behind me. This sense of loneliness was really devastating.”

Francis, already fidgeting, put up his hand.

“One question, if I may,” he said, “and I’ll not interrupt again.”

“By all means,” said the other patiently. “What is it?”

“Were you—we are such old friends”—he apologized—“were you still celibate as ever?”

Farque looked surprised, then smiled. “My

habits had not changed," he replied. "I was, as always, celibate."

"Ah!" murmured the doctor, and settled down to listen.

"And I think now," his friend went on, "that it was the lack of companionship that first turned my thoughts toward conscious disappointment. However that may be, it was one evening, as I walked homeward to my little house, that I caught my imagination lingering upon English memories, though chiefly, I admit, upon my old Chinese tutor, the dead Shan-Yu.

"It was dusk, the stars were coming out in the pale evening air, and the orchards, as I passed them, stood like wavering ghosts of unbelievable beauty. The effect of thousands upon thousands of these trees, flooding the twilight of a spring evening with their sea of blossom, is almost unearthly. They seem transparencies, their colour hangs sheets upon the very sky. I crossed a small wooden bridge that joined two of these orchards above a stream, and in the dark water I watched a moment the mingled reflection of stars and flowering branches on the quiet surface. It seemed too exquisite to belong to earth, this fairy garden of stars and blossoms, shining faintly in the crystal depths, and my thought, as I gazed, dived suddenly down the little avenue that memory opened into former days. I remembered Shan-Yu's present, given to me when he died. His very words came back to me: The Garden of Happiness in the Valley of the Thousand Temples, with its

promise of love, of seven years of happiness, and the prophecy that I should follow his body toward the Sunrise and meet my destiny.

"This memory I took home with me into my lonely little one-story house upon the hill. My servants did not sleep there. There was no one near. I sat by the open window with my thoughts, and you may easily guess that before very long I had unearthed the long-forgotten packet from among my things, spread a portion of its contents on a metal tray above a lighted brazier, and was comfortably seated before it, inhaling the light blue smoke with its exquisite and fragrant perfume.

"A light air entered through the window, the distant orchards below me trembled, rose, and floated through the dusk, and I found myself, almost at once, in a pavilion of flowers; a blue river lay shining in the sun before me, as it wandered through a lovely valley where I saw groves of flowering trees among a thousand scattered temples. Drenched in light and colour, the Valley lay dreaming amid a peaceful loveliness that woke what seemed impossible, unrealizable, longings in my heart. I yearned toward its groves and temples; I would bathe my soul in that flood of tender light and my body in the blue coolness of that winding river. In a thousand temples must I worship. Yet these impossible yearnings instantly were satisfied. I found myself there at once . . . and the time that passed over my head you may reckon in centuries, if not in ages. I was in the Garden

of Happiness, and its marvellous perfume banished time and sorrow; there was no end to chill the soul, nor any beginning, which is its foolish counterpart.

"Nor was there loneliness." The speaker clasped his thin hands, and closed his eyes a moment in what was evidently an ecstasy of the sweetest memory man may ever know. A slight trembling ran through his frame, communicating itself to his friend upon the divan beside him—this understanding, listening, sympathetic friend, whose eyes had never once yet withdrawn their attentive gaze from the narrator's face.

"I was not alone," the scholar resumed, opening his eyes again, and smiling out of some deep inner joy. "Shan-Yu came down the steps of the first temple and took my hand, while the great golden figures in the dim interior turned their splendid shining heads to watch. Then, breathing the soul of his ancient wisdom in my ear, he led me through all the perfumed ways of that enchanted Garden, worshipping with me at a hundred deathless shrines; led me, I tell you, to the sound of soft gongs and gentle bells, by fragrant groves and sparkling streams, mid a million gorgeous flowers, until, beneath that unsetting sun, we reached the heart of the Valley, where the source of the river gushed forth beneath the lighted mountains. He stopped and pointed across the narrow waters. I saw the woman——"

"*The woman*," his listener murmured beneath

his breath, though Farque seemed unaware of interruption.

"She smiled at me and held her hands out, and while she did so, even before I could express my joy and wonder in response, Shan-Yu, I saw, had crossed the narrow stream and stood beside her. I made to follow then, my heart burning with inexpressible delight. But Shan-Yu held up his hand, as they began to move down the flowered bank together, making a sign that I should keep pace with them, though on my own side.

"Thus, side by side, yet with the blue, sparkling stream between us, we followed back along its winding course, through the heart of that enchanted Valley, my hands stretched out toward the radiant figure of my Love, and hers stretched out toward me. They did not touch, but our eyes, our smiles, our thoughts, these met and mingled in a sweet union of unimagined bliss, so that the absence of physical contact was unnoticed and laid no injury on our marvellous joy. It was a spirit union, and our kiss a spirit kiss. Therein lay the subtlety and glory of the Chinese wonder, for it was our *essences* that met, and for such union there is no satiety and, equally, no possible end. The Perfume of the Garden of Happiness is an essence. We were in Eternity.

"The stream, meanwhile, widened between us, and as it widened, my Love grew farther from me in space, smaller, less visibly defined, yet ever essentially more perfect, and never once

with a sense of distance that made our union less divinely close. Across the widening reaches of blue, sunlit water I still knew her smile, her eyes, the gestures of her radiant being; I saw her exquisite reflection in the stream; and, mid the music of those soft gongs and gentle bells, the voice of Shan-Yu came like a melody to my ears:

“‘You have followed me into the Sunrise, and have found your Destiny. Behold now your Love. In this Valley of a Thousand Temples you have known the Garden of Happiness, and its Perfume your soul now inhales.’

“‘I am bathed,’ I answered, ‘in a happiness divine. It is for ever.’

“‘The Waters of Separation,’ his answer floated like a bell, ‘lie widening between you.’

“I moved nearer to the bank, impelled by the pain in his words to take my Love and hold her to my breast.

“‘But I would cross to her,’ I cried, and saw that, as I moved, Shan-Yu and my Love came likewise closer to the water’s edge across the widening river. They both obeyed, I was aware, my slightest wish.

“‘Seven years of happiness you may know,’ sang his gentle tones across the brimming flood, ‘if you would cross to her. Yet the Destroyer of Honourable Homes lies in the shadows that you must cast outside.’

“I heard his words, I noticed for the first time that in the blaze of this radiant sunshine we cast no shadows on the sea of flowers at our

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feet, and—I stretched out my arms toward my Love across the river.

“ ‘I accept my destiny,’ I cried, ‘I will have my seven years of bliss,’ and stepped forward into the running flood. As the cool water took my feet, my Love’s hands stretched out both to hold me and to bid me stay. There was acceptance in her gesture, but there was warning too.

“I did not falter. I advanced until the water bathed my knees, and my Love, too, came to meet me, the stream already to her waist, while our arms stretched forth above the running flood toward each other.

“The change came suddenly. Shan-Yu first faded behind her advancing figure into air; there stole a chill upon the sunlight; a cool mist rose from the water, hiding the Garden and the hills beyond; our fingers touched, I gazed into her eyes, our lips lay level with the water—and the room was dark and cold about me. The brazier stood extinguished at my side. The dust had burnt out, and no smoke rose. I slowly left my chair and closed the window, for the air was chill.”

V

It was difficult at first to return to Hampstead and the details of ordinary life about him. Francis looked round him slowly, freeing himself gradually from the spell his friend’s words had laid even upon his analytical temperament. The transition was helped, however, by the

details that everywhere met his eye. The Chinese atmosphere remained. More, its effect had gained, if anything. The embroideries of yellow gold, the pictures, the lacquered stools and inlaid cabinets—above all, the exquisite figures in green jade upon the shelf beside him—all this, in the shimmering pale olive light the lamps shed everywhere, helped his puzzled mind to bridge the gulf from the Garden of Happiness into the decorated villa upon Hampstead Heath.

There was silence between the two men for several minutes. Far was it from the doctor's desire to injure his old friend's delightful fantasy. For he called it fantasy, although something in him doubted. He remained, therefore, silent. Truth to tell, perhaps, he knew not exactly what to say.

Farque broke the silence himself. He had not moved since the story ended; he sat motionless, his hands tightly clasped, his eyes alight with the memory of his strange imagined joy, his face rapt and almost luminous, as though he still wandered through the groves of the enchanted Garden and inhaled the perfume of its perfect happiness in the Valley of the Thousand Temples.

"It was two days later," he went on suddenly in his quiet voice, "only two days afterwards, that I met her."

"You met her? You met the woman of your dream?" Francis's eyes opened very wide.

"In that little harbour town," repeated Farque

calmly, "I met her in the flesh. She had just landed in a steamer from up the coast. The details are of no particular interest. She knew me, of course, at once. And, naturally, I knew her."

The doctor's tongue refused to act as he heard. It dawned upon him suddenly that his friend was married. He remembered the woman's touch about the house; he recalled, too, for the first time that the letter of invitation to dinner had said "come to *us*." He was full of a bewildered astonishment.

The reaction upon himself was odd, perhaps, yet wholly natural. His heart warmed toward his imaginative friend. He could now tell him his own new strange romance. The woman who haunted him crept back into the room and sat between them. He found his tongue.

"You married her, Edward?" he exclaimed.

"She is my wife," was the reply, in a gentle, happy voice.

"A Ch——" he could not bring himself to say the word. "A foreigner?"

"My wife is a Chinese woman," Farque helped him easily, with a delighted smile.

So great was the other's absorption in the actual moment that he had not heard the step in the passage that his host had heard. The latter stood up suddenly.

"I hear her now," he said. "I'm glad she's come back before you left." He stepped toward the door.

But before he reached it, the door was opened and in came the woman herself. Francis tried to rise, but something had happened to him. His heart missed a beat. Something, it seemed, broke in him. He faced a tall, graceful young Englishwoman with black eyes of sparkling happiness, the woman of his own romance. She still wore the feather boa round her neck. She was no more Chinese than he was.

"My wife," he heard Farque introducing them, as he struggled to his feet, searching feverishly for words of congratulation, normal, everyday words he ought to use. "I'm so pleased, oh, so pleased," Farque was saying—he heard the sound from a distance, his sight was blurred as well—"my two best friends in the world, my English comrade and my Chinese wife." His voice was absolutely sincere with conviction and belief.

"But we have already met," came the woman's delightful voice, her eyes full upon his face with smiling pleasure. "I saw you at Mrs Malleson's tea only this afternoon."

And Francis remembered suddenly that the Mallesons were old acquaintances of Farque's as well as of himself. "And I even dared to ask who you were," the voice went on, floating from some other space, it seemed, to his ears. "I had you pointed out to me. I had heard of you from Edward, of course. But you vanished before I could be introduced."

The doctor mumbled something or other polite and, he hoped, adequate. But the truth had flashed upon him with remorseless sudden-

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ness. She had "heard of" him—the famous mental specialist. Her interest in him was cruelly explained, cruelly both for himself and for his friend. Farque's delusion lay clear before his eyes. An awakening to reality might involve dislocation of the mind. *She*, too, moreover, knew the truth. She was involved as well. And her interest in himself was—consultation.

"Seven years we've been married, just seven years to-day," Farque was saying thoughtfully, as he looked at them. "Curious, rather, isn't it?"

"Very," said Francis, turning his regard from the black eyes to the grey.

Thus it was that Owen Francis left the house a little later with a mind in a measure satisfied, yet in a measure forgetful too—forgetful of his own deep problem, because another of even greater interest had replaced it.

"Why undeceive him?" ran his thought. "He need never know. It's harmless, anyhow—I can tell her that."

But side by side with this reflection ran another that was oddly haunting, considering his type of mind: "Destroyer of Honourable Homes," was the form of words it took. And with a sigh he added, "Chinese Magic."

From "The Wolves of God"

THE LAND OF GREEN GINGER

IN his luxurious service flat the elderly Mr Adam sat before the fire with a frown upon his face, a frown not of anger or annoyance but of perplexity. It was the cosy time between tea and dinner; about his armchair lay scattered a number of opened and unopened letters; he was scanning a brief typewritten note, wondering how he should deal with it, and this wonder was the cause of his frown.

"These newspaper symposiums," he grumbled to himself, "are a nuisance!" His secretary had gone home, taking away with her the dictated chapters of his book, his twentieth novel—his twentieth *successful* novel, he remembered with a smile that momentarily displaced the frown. "'How I started,'" he read the typed sentence before him. "'What made me first begin to write?'" The frown came back. Thought ran off into the mists of years ago. . . . He remembered quite well what made him first begin to write. "But no one would believe me. . . ." His face grew quite puckered. . . . He finally decided he would dictate in the morning a few commonplace paragraphs, giving facts, of course, yet not this queer incident that had first discovered his gift to himself. It had been

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due to a shock, this discovery; and a shock, some say, can bring out latent possibilities in the mind hitherto ignored. Circumstances, that is, are necessary for their appearance; unless life produces them, the possibilities remain unknown, inactive.

He remembered the shock in his own case, the queer experience it produced, and the first hint of his imaginative gift that appeared as a result. "But they'd think I was romancing!" His pencil, meanwhile, scribbled a few words on the blank part of the letter. . . .

"It is interesting," he paused a moment to reflect, "how every important detail of the experience was due to something in my mind at the time. All the ingredients were in me. Something just used them, dramatized them. That's the imaginative gift, I suppose. . . . It shapes the raw material."

He could see it all as though it were yesterday . . . instead of thirty years ago. . . .

The shock, in his case, had been the sudden total loss of the comfortable fortune he had been brought up to expect. The trustee, his guardian, had played ducks and drakes with it, and at twenty, an orphan, just down from Oxford with a prospect of £2,000 a year, he found himself instead with £50, perhaps less. Two details only bear importantly upon the story: his intense bitterness against the swindling guardian, whom he knew personally, and the question of what he could do to earn his living. These two, had he written the truth for the symposium,

Mr Adam would have stressed. For it was with these two, this thought and this feeling burning intensely in his mind, that he had gone for a walk to think things over. . . .

To him, at the age of twenty, the situation seemed intensely tragic; no one in the world before had ever been so overwhelmed by fate; his anger against the psalm-singing guardian was of that bitter kind that could have killed. The young man was stirred to an intense anger and hatred. He could have murdered Mr Holyoake. The swindler deserved it. And Adam, dwelling upon the years of dishonest speculation that had left him penniless, meant this precisely. Not that he actually wanted to commit murder, but that he realized the possibility lay in him. He still remembered—with a smile to-day—how he finally dismissed the idea from his mind: “What’s the use?” he had reflected bitterly. “Even if I did murder him, the State would only murder me in return. I should be hanged. Who murders is murdered in his turn.”

In this way the notion was—as he believed—dismissed from his mind.

The other “important detail” concerned his immediate future. What could he do to earn his living? He dwelt upon it with eager concentration. He reviewed a dozen futures: the stage, journalism, the motor trade, then in its infancy; insurance, emigrating—he thought of many fields and callings, but realized he was trained for none. The choice of work, of

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something that he *could* do, troubled him obsessingly. There were a hundred, a thousand, possible futures open to a fellow, he discovered. It was the choice that he found impossible. At a given moment in anybody's life, he reflected, a number of possible things lie waiting—he can take only one, but the multiple choice is there.

He had been walking for some time, and in a circle apparently, for he now found himself wandering toward the water-front of the ancient port that was his home town. It was after six o'clock on a summer evening, a Saturday, and few people were about. The sunshine fell slanting down the tangle of deserted alleyways. There was a smell of the sea, of tarred ropes, rigging, fish, and these brought back the idea of emigrating. He thought of a cousin who had just gone to some job or other in China. . . . One notion chased another; his mind was a seething mass of wild ideas, with bitter, turbulent emotion behind them. Then, glancing up, his eye caught suddenly five little words, whose faded black letters shone in a patch of sunshine on the dull brick wall above his head. They were rather romantic little words, and they snatched at something in his mind. He stood and stared. It was merely the name of the alley, of course, yet thought took a new turn. A kind of enchantment stole over him, for the words, as the poet puts it, walked up and down in his heart. . . . There rose before him a picture of forgotten days when the old port traded with Southern isles, when dark-bearded sailors

gabbling foreign tongues thronged these narrow alleyways, and the high romance of gallant sailing-ships was in the air. . . . The five little words were almost a line of poetry.

"The Land of Green Ginger," was what he read.

Mr Adam, the young one of thirty years ago, paused, his eyes fastened on the faded lettering in the yellow sunlight. Then he stared down the twisting alley, whose high walls now housed nothing more romantic than offices of ship-brokers, notaries, typists, packers, and commissioners of oaths, until his eyes noted suddenly an exception—an old-furniture shop, with its queer wares overflowing on to the narrow pavement. They were a heterogeneous collection apparently. A circular mirror standing on a three-legged pedestal nearly six feet high reflected his figure as he moved idly toward the shop a few yards lower down. He saw himself reflected, not without satisfaction, his smart flannel suit, his eyeglass, his straw hat with its Oxford colours. He also saw a bent, thin little old man with a skull-cap on his head standing among the shadows a few feet inside beyond the dingy doorway.

This figure now moved slowly toward him, scenting perhaps a possible customer.

"A fine piece," said the wheezy voice. "A perfect bit of glass, me lord! Cheap, too!" He rubbed his hands, nodding his ancient head in the direction of the article. "It come from Chiney thirty year ago!"

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Adam realized that he had been examining his own reflection for some minutes. He entered the shop, as an escape from troubling thoughts more than anything else, and as he did so the old man, bowing and scraping, moved, too, backing away before him. The interior was dark, and much larger than the small entrance promised. A single oil-lamp revealed a series of deep, narrow rooms, cluttered up with stuff, among which the bent figure now set down the mirror carefully, for he had carried it in with him.

In the dimness the young man found his own reflection more attractive than before: it was softened, more effective, he decided. The wheezy voice was mentioning a price, rather a trumpery price, considered Mr Adam, a few shillings only. He did not want to buy it, but anything was better than being alone with his tormenting thoughts, and he went closer to examine it. He bent down, noticing an inscription cut deeply into the dark wood of the framework. It was in Chinese characters. He ran his finger over them, then looked up to ask.

"*Who looks in me,*" translated the wheezy voice, "*murders—and is murdered.*" And, carrying the mirror with him, the old man retreated a little further into the shadow of the room beyond.

The young man was startled. He felt his body give an imperceptible twitch he was unable to suppress. His mind likewise gave a twitch. Was it uneasiness? It was, at any rate, surprise,

while at the same time he was aware that something drew him, so that, almost involuntarily, he found himself following the retreating figure, who now, still carrying the mirror with him, was on the threshold of the next long room. It was the third extension of the premises, and it was considerably darker than the first two rooms. A chilliness hung in the fusty atmosphere. The place seemed lonely suddenly.

Aware of a faint tremor in him, though not yet of anything more than that, he spoke in a brusque, almost an aggressive, voice.

"And what may such rubbish mean?" he inquired sharply.

"Precisely what it says, me lord," came the wheezy voice, much lower than before. There was an unpleasant hush in it. And there came a look into the face that hardly invited merriment, which was, perhaps, the very reason why Mr Adam chose the moment for an audible guffaw. It betrayed him, he realized, when it was too late. He felt nervous. More of a chuckle than an actual laugh, it sounded unnatural among this piled-up paraphernalia from foreign lands that gave back no single echo. It sounded dead.

"Does it hold good?" Mr Adam challenged, the tone of his voice again betraying him—to himself at least. For the tremor crept somehow from the body into the sound. "If I buy the thing, for instance, d'you mean to tell me that *I*—that *you* already before me——?"

He could not finish the sentence. A shudder

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stopped his breath, and the voice died on his lips. While speaking he had been looking, not into the old man's face, but into the mirror, where he still saw his own reflection. But it was not this that stopped his speech and froze his blood. It was something else he saw. With one wrinkled hand the old shopman still clutched the pedestal; in the other was an unsheathed knife.

"So far, me lord, it has held good," came his whisper down the long, dim room, and as he spoke he tilted the mirror to a slightly different angle. The young man saw himself in the glass as before, but he now saw something else behind him, too. It lay stretched upon the floor, motionless, crumpled dreadfully, its position not quite natural. One arm was twisted about the face at an angle not possible to life. In the narrow fairway of the room behind him, the room he had already passed, this pitiful, repulsive body lay. To stand where he now stood, the young man realized, he must actually have stepped over it.

"*You*—did—that?" he gasped, in a voice that emitted hardly any sound.

"He looked in the mirror," came the whispered answer. "What d'you expect?"

"And before that—*he* in turn——?"

"It works that way," the other gave with an awful grin.

Adam felt his body stiffen; yet the blood began to flow in tumult. He felt his fists clench tightly. With his eye fixed on the shop-

man and not leaving him for a single instant, he saw that the old man, letting go of the mirror, had begun to dodge. Light-footed he was, amazingly agile, quick, his movements convulsive, horribly alert. He dodged sideways, backwards, swift as a shadow round his customer, who watched the hideous dance with arrested muscles and with spell-bound eyes. The knife gleamed and flashed.

Adam made an effort that seemed to wrench his heart—and the muscles began to function again. Instinctively he picked up a heavy iron mace from a teak-wood table close beside him. With a strain he could just lift it.

"It's up to *me* then, now—is it?" he cried, his own feet shifting quickly.

"I can defend meself!" shrieked the shopman, dodging with incredible rapidity. "If *that's* any good to you, me lord!" he yelled, shooting across the floor as an arrow flies, and brandishing the knife.

Moved by a sudden power that surprised himself, the young man leaped toward the pirouetting horror. He made one bound. He swung his heavy mace. The great weapon crashed down upon the ancient skull, driving the cap deep into the split bone. The figure stopped abruptly, uttered a tiny squeak, crumpled, and lay like a great mutilated insect where it fell. It did not move again.

"Murders and *is* murdered!" the other tried to scream, his voice, as in extreme nightmare agony, making no sound upon the air. "I've

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done *you* in, at any rate. Then it's *my* turn next, is it——?"

He turned swiftly, with the feeling that someone watched him from behind.

A tall figure, sure enough, darkened the distant door into the street, the outline of a stranger who bent a little to examine something that stood upon the pavement just outside. The young man stared and stared. Though in semi-darkness himself, the outline was clearly defined in the evening light. But was it a stranger? He wore a smart flannel suit, a straw hat with Oxford colours. As he straightened up, an eyeglass became visible.

Mr Adam shot round and stared at the crumpled heap upon the floor at his feet. It was *not* the shopman. What he stared down at wore a neat flannel suit, a straw hat with Oxford colours.

He shrieked. He raced headlong down the room. He darted at top speed along the next narrow room as well, straight toward the street door, toward the stranger with the tall outline. And this tall outline now came gliding to meet him, very swiftly gliding, silently too, making no sound upon the boarded floor, just as he had seen his own reflected image gliding toward himself in the mirror before. Closer it came and closer, something oddly, dreadfully familiar about it, something that he almost recognized. It came remorselessly nearer, he could not have stopped it if he tried, while, curiously, he felt that he did not want to, even *must* not, stop it.

Like Fate—his own fate—he must meet it; he could not avoid it—because he somehow welcomed it.

He did not pause himself; he even moved faster, till there was but a foot between them. Terrified he was, yet at the same time his courage rose. They met, they slipped into one another, they emerged, and instantaneously though this came about, he had time to recognize—himself . . . and that same second to find himself standing on the pavement outside, gazing at a mirror on a high three-legged pedestal, while a little, thin, bent old man faced him, wearing a skull-cap and rubbing his hands. It was the shopman evidently, scenting a possible customer.

“A fine piece,” the old man wheezed. His eyes pierced like gimlets. “And cheap, too. It come from Chiney thirty year ago.”

A wave of pleasant, even delightful, emotion fluttered through the young man’s heart as he bent to read an inscription carved in Chinese characters upon the wooden frame. He ran his finger over them, then looked up to ask.

“*To each,*” the wheezy voice translated, “*ten thousand futures. Yet each must choose,*” and went on to explain how a learned gentleman had once kindly deciphered the words for him—only the young man was no longer listening. He was staring intently at the upper part of the frame.

“But—the frame’s empty!” he cried aloud. “There *is* no mirror!” And again that marvellous emotion passed fluttering across his heart.

“It got broke,” he heard the wheezy voice

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explaining, "got broke on the vige over. But it's easy put in again, me lord. A fine old piece." He mentioned a trumpery price, a few shillings merely.

Young Mr Adam bought it and took it home with him. . . . In due course he entered his cousin's insurance office as a clerk, and one evening he scribbled an account of his adventure in the Land of Green Ginger. Later, he wrote other, longer adventures, too. He had inside him, it seems, some queer gift of scribbling imaginary, possibly imaginative, adventures. . . . A shock had brought it to the surface.

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Next morning the elderly Mr Adam dictated to his secretary a few commonplace paragraphs about "How I started to write." They began: "At the age of twenty I entered an insurance office as a clerk. . . ." They were extremely dull. "Send it to the editor," he told his secretary, "with a line to say I hope it is what he wants; he need not use it otherwise, of course." And as he dictated the paragraphs his eye wandered from a long shelf, holding some twenty adventure books, to a mirror on a high three-legged pedestal which, oddly, had no glass, and which, the elderly Mr Adam knew, had never had one, nor ever would.

From "The Radio Times"

THE STRANGER

THE flat lay deadly quiet, voices were hushed, and all moved to and fro on tiptoe. In the room where she lay—the woman who refused to die—this quiet was, of course, most marked, for there her breathing, so faint it was scarcely perceptible, alone broke the pall of silence. The last clearly audible sound had been the lowered voice of the family physician: “I won’t wait now. There is little I can do. I will come back within an hour,” and his heels tapping softly across the tiled floor of the narrow hall toward the lift.

Yes, she might last an hour or two, possibly even till to-morrow, this woman who so hated death that she always refused even to acknowledge it; but she would not wake from unconsciousness. She was sinking fast, the doctor said; the intense vitality at length was unavailing; there was nothing he could do.

And so now it was that the lowered voice, the tap of boots on the tiled floor of the landing, the rumble of the lift, still echoed on in the mind where all else lay muted and repressed.

Apart from two members of the family, and these but nominally, dutifully, affectionate, Colonel Moreland alone was present in that room

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of silence. Elderly, grizzled, with features set in bronze, he sat motionless beside the bed. Looking like a Roman sentinel, he watched the grim, silent fight, whose arena was a few square feet of human frailty, and his was the mind in which the recent sounds seemed still to echo. The others, a stepbrother and an uncle, stood with their backs to him by the window, watching the dusk fall slowly over the dismal London street, not otherwise moved, probably, than by those practical considerations the approaching death of a tolerated relative involved. Priority of place, at any rate, they gave readily to the stern man who sat thus motionless beside the bed, almost a stranger to them, yet whose right, it seemed, they admitted gladly.

With the lessening traffic and the dropping of the winter's night, the silence deepened. A slow wind mourned about the building. The stillness grew. If the faithful serving-woman in the kitchen wept, she wept inaudibly. That she did weep, however, is certain, for some half an hour later, when the Colonel looked into her face, the tears lay still upon her ashen cheeks. . . .

To her, indeed, as to himself, this stealthy approach of death seemed an incredible occurrence, painfully dramatic for all its quiet method of arrival. To the old Scottish woman, a mere lassie from the Highlands when first she entered the family service years before, it seemed impossible that a mistress with such fierce love of living should ever cease to breathe. It was unnatural, almost wicked. A loathing of death,

so intense that it amounted to a fixed refusal to die, must surely—somehow—keep her alive for ever! Death, in her mistress's presence, no one ever dared to mention. Had she not proved it again and again: she—*would* not die!

To both soldier and servant, at any rate, death now seemed an outrage, something almost against the normal order. Yet to Colonel Moreland, though he shared with the humble serving-woman that rare worship of true love which had held faithful over a quarter of a century, the silent battle was painful and dramatic for other, and very different, reasons. From time to time, as the minutes crawled, his eyes would open, gaze for a moment on the face he so passionately loved, then quickly close again, lest the intensity of his inner realization be even by so much dimmed. His thoughts—pictures, rather than actual thoughts—were of long ago, of more recent years, to be exact, of two weeks before, when news of the dangerous seizure had brought him instantly to her side. No trivial, foolish convention had prevented then, as it had prevented years ago. No trumpery considerations of social rank, of thine and mine, differences that in youth appear so great, in later years so petty, had interfered with the over-mastering power that impelled, even commanded, him to see her, before, in the final sense, it was too late, and—to make his long-concealed confession face to face. . . .

Twenty-five years ago ignorance and timidity had sealed his lips. The V.C., gained on the

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North-West Frontier, proved a quality in him which yet had not availed a young man, finely self-forgetful, fighting for a loveliness that seemed wholly beyond his reach; she, all unknowing, had given herself to another—and he had seen her go. Now, on his return from long sojourn in the East, he had heard in one and the same day both of her illness and of her present liberty. He had not hesitated. The late confession had been made that ought to have been made so many years before. She told him her own long secret, too. And in that very breath, which the doctor whispered might be wellnigh her last, she told him likewise—her whole being defiant with aggressive will:

“I shall get well again. I shall live for you. It is never too late for that . . . I *will* get well . . . !”

The pathetic ignominy of it struck even the unimaginative soldier—the defiant little human will now helpless and inoperative as the last cold Shadow stole toward the bed. Death recked not of human desire and intention, however fierce, and the desolate battle, it seemed to him, was a foregone conclusion. Any moment now the remorseless Figure must stand at the door, approach the bed, and steal her from his world. Colonel Moreland, overwrought perhaps a little, pictured in his mind a relentless and unbending Outline. . . .

The stepbrother turned from the window, lighted a softly shaded lamp, then moved back without a sound to the post he held somewhat

awkwardly with his companion. But the bronze outline beside the bed was too intent upon his poignant inner pictures to take much notice of what they did. Only the doctor's lowered voice, the tap of his boots upon the tiled floor outside, the rumble of the descending lift, still echoed on across the background of his mind. . . . These, indeed, and the frail outline beneath the sheets, seemed his sole relations with the outer world. When a step, therefore, became audible in the passage, it was natural he hardly stirred at first, and that the opening and closing of the front door, the murmur of confused voices, too, should have merged in that continuous memory of a mental sound.

There was a cold air that sent a faint shiver over him, but it was the whispering by the window that really disturbed his profound reverie.

"The doctor probably . . . sooner than he meant . . ." he heard one say, and so was on his feet, startled rather, and out in the passage before either of them. But the woman from the kitchen was in front of him. He ran into her in his eagerness, noticed the tears upon her ashen cheeks, and saw at the same time the tall, thin outline of the stranger, who most certainly was *not* the doctor.

A very upright and unbending Outline it was, the stiffness, no doubt, adding to the appearance of the stature, beside which the woman seemed diminutive, almost dwarf-like. The dreadful whiteness of her face he found unwelcome—

more, it troubled him profoundly, though he recalled this only later. There was talk, confused and hurried, yet the voice of the stranger, he believed, was not once actually audible at all. It was the woman's voice and words he caught so distinctly, words whose incongruity must, at any other time, have brought a smile to his stern lips. This appearance, however, of rapid exchange between two persons was as clear to him as the certainty that there was a mistake as well, a mistake that seemed grossly stupid at this moment: the wrong name, the wrong door, the wrong building, of course.

Sharply, then, out of this muttering, the woman's words emerged, both fear and courage in the tone, as she repeated with insistent emphasis that her mistress was not at home: "She's *not* at home . . . to anybody. She's *dying* . . . !"

Colonel Moreland, as he heard, found himself abruptly stopped. He stood stock-still, arrested in his tracks. The incongruity of the language gave him a sense of intolerant impatience, of anger, even. The stupid disturbance, at such a moment was more than he could bear, while yet he took no immediate steps to relieve the fierce vexation that consumed him. His deep annoyance found no outlet. His mind, as well as his muscles, was arrested. There was about the tall, unbending outline of the stranger something indefinable that produced a sudden shock, paralysing him unaccountably on the instant, and with it a flash that struck cold as

winter's ice against his heart. The power of it caught him full: he remained motionless where he stood. . . . Thus, his first impulse to send the caller peremptorily about his business, to push him out of the still open door, was not obeyed; and on turning an instant to see whether the others followed from the bedroom, he was aware of the woman close against him as though for protection, tears upon a face blanched like linen, terror in the staring eyes, and her body shaking like a leaf.

"I couldna' stop him," came her thick whisper.

"He said he would—come back."

It was while she spoke he realized for the first time that she was no longer accompanied. She stood now at his side—alone.

The soldier found his voice, though not yet his entire self-possession. "Come back!" he managed to ejaculate. "Come back!" he repeated. "At a time like this. . . .!"

Words failed him then. He glared at the trembling woman, who now pointed, with helpless, unintelligent gesture, to the drawing-room door behind her. Her body, he noticed, was still quivering all over.

"In there," she muttered. "He went in there. . . .!"

Something turned over in the soldier's heart. He did not argue; he made at first no comment. The one weapon he really understood, a blow, was useless, for he knew not where to aim. His sense of outrage, his anger, moreover, were of a sudden curiously stilled. The ice pressed closer,

but if the hair upon his scalp rose, he denied it violently.

"You are mistaken," he said presently, in his curtest tone. "You made a mistake," he repeated firmly, the anger now oddly gone from his voice as well. "He—he went out by the front door. He will not come back. It was all a mistake, I tell you."

The woman, beneath his compelling eyes, mumbled submissively, yet keeping close against him:

"If ye say so, sir," he heard her whisper. Flustered beyond belief she was, but she was unconvinced, her gaze still fixed in terror on the drawing-room door.

The other found his sternest voice, the one the Army knew, the voice of action.

"Get back to your kitchen," he commanded. "Kneel down! Kneel down, I say, and pray to your God at once!"

She crept away, shuffling, looking back over her shoulder before she disappeared. Her lips were moving, though no words came forth.

Colonel Moreland strode over and closed the front door, peering first along the bare stone floor, across the narrow landing where the gas-jet flared, then down the darkened passage. There was no one visible. No sound broke the silence. He paused an instant, then abruptly did a curious thing. He said something without knowing why he said it:

"Your mistress," his sudden whisper followed the trembling woman, though probably

inaudible to her, "will not die. She will recover."

As he spoke the words, wondering whence came his marvellously sure conviction, he pushed into the drawing-room. He felt his courage ebbing. A second's hesitation, and it must have failed him. He went in boldly.

Again, if the hair upon his scalp rose up, he denied it violently; if that touch of ice pressed nearer on his heart, he faced it; his muscles, if they trembled, were in a grip of iron.

Inside the threshold he felt for the light and switched it on. One glance at the chintz-covered furniture sufficed. There was no figure, there was no living presence. The room was empty.

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Their marriage, late in life, proved beyond words a happy one, for passion's turbulence left no dread of a reaction, and the deeper ties were free to utter their fine call unhampered. If regret for unrealized glories tinged its glamour, it held at least no sordid pity for a gross remorse. To them it seemed unclouded, the gardened house in Kent, surrounded by gracious friends, its perfect setting.

The faithful serving-woman had gone her way, her curious problem with her—so far, at least, as Colonel Moreland had ever questioned. The soldier, indeed, kept his own counsel about a matter he had not cared to probe by cross-examination; his wife, on this point, was never

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in his confidence. The puzzle remained, for him, unsolved. The woman had seen; he, too, had seen. Yet, since both observers were in a condition of high nervous tension at the time—overwrought, he termed it—neither possibly, for that matter, had seen anything at all. This was the explanation laborious self-deception used; temperament selected it, and stiff self-restraint maintained it, with an effort.

In his own inmost mind, none the less, there lurked a doubt no deliberate effort could wholly stifle. A note of interrogation, like a hidden flame, glowed and would not fade. As soldier, as Englishman, he had that abhorrence of the unordinary which was his due; “supernatural” was a word not found in his vocabulary; hostility, scepticism, rose automatically when anything of the kind was mentioned. He had seen, more than most perhaps, what mysterious India had to show, and had enjoyed it; for trickery might baffle the mind pleasantly without stretching it into uncomfortable postures. Through thick and thin he had always maintained this comfortable attitude; he was not going to change it now for anybody in the world. The doubt, the note of interrogation, none the less, persisted; there was a question, though a question never asked.

He was glad the serving-woman had gone to a world where questions were impossible, for the fear had been in him that one day he must ask her—worse still, that she might speak to

him. He was now relieved of that anxiety. Yet there was another question, independent of an answerer. This was a faint, disturbing memory, though a memory he could never feel quite sure about, since he himself, the only person who might explain it, found no positive answer in him. Had he indeed caught that other voice, or had he not?

A fitful wind, he remembered, moaned in gusts about the building at the time; up the shaft it sighed, and through the opened door as well. A moaning wind could be responsible for sounds a strained mind might well twist into syllables, into the semblance of a voice with words, even into a definite sentence. It had made strange, restless noises, that fitful wind. He was a careful man: he would never positively swear to it. Yet to this sentence had been due his amazing conviction that recovery suddenly was certain, though only afterwards did he realize why he used the words he actually had used to the woman. . . .

There remained this disquieting, persistent memory of another voice, almost a whisper—little more, perhaps, than a breath of wind: "*I will come back . . .*" and so gently uttered it seemed to have been sighed into his understanding, rather than spoken audibly: "*I will come back.*"

Yet the doctor, he remembered, had used a similar phrase when he left half an hour earlier. Was not this second voice, perhaps, its reproduction in a mind troubled and overwrought, a

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mind still echoing the footsteps on the tiled floor, the rumble of the lift? He would not positively swear; as already said, he was a careful man. He realized only his sudden, positive assurance that recovery from that moment had become a definite certainty.

The note of interrogation thus remained. It haunted and troubled him for years, till with the passage of time it grew less present, less discomfoting, at any rate. But it did not die. He could never entirely forget it.

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Their happiness, meanwhile, if calm, was of the radiant kind that nothing, least of all differences of opinion, could disturb. Firmly based upon fundamentals, it was securely anchored in a deep need each had of the other. They supplied, indeed, respectively, one another's deficiencies, finding life's harvest rich and wonderful; and tolerance seemed their native gift. Yet a single dread they shared in common: lest one should be taken and the other left. That the final harvesting might come for both together was their intense desire.

The house, as a rule, had voices ringing through it; young voices, for they were the kind young people love. Friends of earlier years came with their children, a married niece, a holiday group, so that corridors and garden-paths were alive with footsteps, calling, laughter; everywhere among the lawns and shrubberies moving figures darted, little people climbed

the stairs, the children's quarters echoed, and young life had its happy way.

On this particular Sunday in late September, for the first time, indeed, during the entire summer, they found themselves alone. The Colonel's niece, with her brood of boys and girls, had left the day before, preparatory to Black Monday when schools reopen. It seemed as if a school treat, rather than four children with their mother, now left the house and grounds so still, so strangely quiet. The servants, as a reward for recent special services, had been given afternoon leave. . . . There was a touch of melancholy about both house and grounds, of emptiness, almost of desertion, and in their own hearts, too, there lay a certain emptiness, a silence that held half-ghostly whispers of unspoken questions. Though neither gave it utterance, the same thought echoed in that inner chamber, where, but for the trick the years had played them, might now have sounded the pattering of little feet, the cries and laughter, the presences, indeed, of children of their own.

To this thought, tinged with inevitable regret, neither ever permitted utterance; but now, as they sat after tea upon the lawn, each knew full well that the other's inmost chamber *was* thus tenanted. There was a happy telepathy between them they did not question. Inexplicable it might be, but frequent custom had established it beyond argument, so that even to Colonel Moreland's strict habit of mind it had become

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a commonplace. Some incalculable sympathy of love had taught them the code, the soldier himself acknowledging the results without demur. . . .

He made his suggestion quietly, glancing at her through the cigar-smoke the air hardly stirred: "Aloud, dear—won't you?" Then, seeing that she hesitated, he added: "You say them so beautifully always."

He touched her hand, yet turned his head away to listen, for poetry made him shy. He closed his eyes, as she began, his face in mask-like repose. It was the voice, perhaps, as much as the exquisite words that he enjoyed, floating to him over the still lawn and flower-beds, where the sunset lay in slanting gold. Its music called up pictures of so many years ago . . . of bright, wondrous hours . . . "of hours that might have been, yet had not been . . ." and yet, it seems, of one Hour in particular:

"The hour which might have been yet might
not be,

Which man's and woman's heart conceived
and bore,

Yet whereof life was barren—on what shore
Bides it the breaking of Time's weary sea?"

She paused a moment. He was aware of her eyes upon his own, a question in them, so that he shyly turned to meet her gaze. Thrilled to a deeper understanding than he had ever known before, he divined that question instantly; but he spoke no word, because no word came to

him to speak . . . while the stillness deepened about them, and the shadows lengthened on the lawn. There was a new, sudden stirring in the depths within him. His whole being listened; it was almost as though he waited, expecting something; and the breeze that just moved the rose-leaves behind her hair seemed to mingle with the voice, as she continued:

“Bondchild of all consummate joys set free,
It somewhere sighs and serves, and mute
before
The House of Love, hears through the
echoing door
His hours elect in choral consonancy. . . .”

Again she paused a moment; and again she raised her eyes to his; listening, as it were, to the Hours Elect that had known realization, yet for themselves had never struck. He, too, listened; and, as he listened, understanding in him marvellously and sharply opened, so that his whole life rushed suddenly past, presenting with that lightning meaning due, they say, to drowning men, each separate item of failure or success, yet emphasized with its ultimate truth as wisdom or defeat. This lightning experience was abruptly his, lasting at most a second. The flash seemed timeless. . . . It passed . . . and he sat listening for her voice, and waiting with a sigh.

He remembered the lines to follow. That “Little Outcast Hour” lay in his inmost thought, perhaps, as he felt sure it lay in hers.

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There was a look in her eyes, he noticed, that gave him happiness and terror suddenly, the terror of some mighty happiness hitherto unknown, a happiness, he felt, that must be more than he could bear, unless she shared it with him.

The world he realized at this moment was, in any case, an inner world. Of this he was vividly aware. It held no shyness. In it, for him, only the mightier movements passed. . . .

A flooding wave broke over him. He took her hand. "Beautiful," he stammered, "beautiful and true. How—how could he know——?"

His words halted, as the wave momentarily withdrew. An inner breathlessness caught him, a groping almost physical, lest his feet be swept from under him, lest he be borne away from his known foundations. He held tightly to the fingers in his own.

"Your hand, dear," he heard himself saying. "It's cold."

He waited a moment. It seemed to him he had been speaking for a long, long time; for days; for years; for centuries.

A new coolness, he noticed, had stolen into the air. It had been coming closer, ever closer; it had now invaded both of them.

Something was happening to her as well as to himself. The happiness, the terror, the returning wave. . . . His feet lost touch, his mind went groping. . . .

He made a prodigious effort, and it caused him an agony never before experienced.

"Shall we go in now?" he managed to say, his breath difficult to control. "The damp—is rising."

The familiar words, the commonplace effort, made him realize abruptly that a few seconds only—a scarcely perceptible interval—had passed since her voice ceased on the spoken lines and she had looked into his eyes. But she was still looking into his eyes. Her lips, he saw, were moving. . . . Only a second had passed, he struggled to remember; only a fleeting second, after all. . . .

It was, perhaps, a revelation that came upon them across that quiet English lawn, stealing past the roses, using the last sunset light to clothe itself, and taking the notes of a thrush that now burst suddenly into rapturous song in the cedar by the house. The low human tones surely came floating down the evening air rather than from her own lips.

"But, lo! what wedded souls now hand in hand
Together tread at last the immortal strand,
With eyes where burning memory lights love home?"

The voice, the singing of the bird, hushed simultaneously, as a tide of happiness too great for human consciousness burst flooding over him, drowning all utterance in its wave. He saw her eyes—the way they now shifted from his own, searching the space behind him. She had stopped dead. His blood ebbed, then flushed again.

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“Look!” He caught her low voice. “What is it? So upright, so unbending; and—by the hand—a little child?”

“Dear,” he faltered, following the direction of her gaze, “but—I see no one—no one.”

The lawn was empty.

The next lines—did she say them, or did he hear them singing within him as his feet lost their final touch with earth?

“Lo! how the little outcast hour has turned
And leaped to them and in their faces
yearned.”

He saw her try to rise. Her hands were stretched out beyond him. Her face was radiant with a burning glory. The last line yet hung upon her lips.

He made once again a prodigious effort. “No, no!” he wanted to cry aloud. “Don’t say it, dear—don’t say it——”

It was too late. He struggled to his feet in vain. No muscle, either of tongue or limb, obeyed. A flood of light drove down the evening air, awful yet lovely, and from the heart of it a voice—

“I am your child: O parents, ye have come!”

It was the servant, returning in the dusk, who found them, not sitting in their chairs, but side by side upon the lawn, fallen, her right hand holding his, her other stretched out toward the house, as though . . . “as though,” the old

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butler put it, "they had gone to meet someone. That's how they looked to me . . . and the faces both young and smiling." Between the roses they lay thus, close together.

From "The Contemporary Review"

FIRST HATE

THEY had been shooting all day; the weather had been perfect and the powder straight, so that when they assembled in the smoking-room after dinner they were well-pleased with themselves. From discussing the day's sport and the weather outlook, the conversation drifted to other, though still cognate, fields. Lawson, the crack shot of the party, mentioned the instinctive recognition all animals feel for their natural enemies, and gave several instances in which he had tested it—tame rats with a ferret, birds with a snake, and so forth.

“Even after being domesticated for generations,” he said, “they recognize their natural enemy at once by instinct, an enemy they can never even have seen before. It's infallible. They know instantly.”

“Undoubtedly,” said a voice from the corner chair; “and so do we.”

The speaker was Ericssen, their host, a great hunter before the Lord, generally uncommunicative but a good listener, leaving the talk to others. For this latter reason, as well as for a certain note of challenge in his voice, his abrupt statement gained attention.

“What do you mean exactly by ‘so do we’?”

asked three men together, after waiting some seconds to see whether he meant to elaborate, which he evidently did not.

"We belong to the animal kingdom, of course," put in a fourth, for behind the challenge there obviously lay a story, though a story that might be difficult to drag out of him. It was.

Ericssen, who had leaned forward a moment so that his strong, humorous face was in clear light, now sank back again into his chair, his expression concealed by the red lampshade at his side. The light played tricks, obliterating the humorous, almost tender, lines, while emphasizing the strength of the jaw and nose. The red glare lent to the whole a rather grim expression.

Lawson, man of authority among them, broke the little pause.

"You're dead right," he observed; "but how do you know it?"—for John Ericssen never made a positive statement without a good reason for it. That good reason, he felt sure, involved a personal proof, but a story Ericssen would never tell before a general audience. He would tell it later, however, when the others had left. "There's such a thing as instinctive antipathy, of course," he added, with a laugh, looking round him. "That's what you mean, probably."

"I meant exactly what I said," replied the host bluntly. "There's first love. There's first hate, too."

"Hate's a strong word," remarked Lawson.

"So is love," put in another.

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"Hate's strongest," said Ericssen grimly. "In the animal kingdom, at least," he added suggestively, and then kept his lips closed, except to sip his liquor, for the rest of the evening—until the party at length broke up, leaving Lawson and one other man, both old trusted friends of many years' standing.

"It's not a tale I'd tell to everybody," he began, when they were alone. "It's true, for one thing; for another, you see, some of those good fellows"—he indicated the empty chairs with an expressive nod of his great head—"some of 'em knew him. You both knew him too, probably."

"The man you hated," said the understanding Lawson.

"And who hated me," came the quiet confirmation. "My other reason," he went on, "for keeping quiet was that the tale involves my wife."

The two listeners said nothing, but each remembered the curiously long courtship that had been the prelude to his marriage. No engagement had been announced, the pair were devoted to one another, there was no known rival on either side; yet the courtship continued without coming to its expected conclusion. Many stories were afloat in consequence. It was a social mystery that intrigued the gossips.

"I may tell you two," Ericssen continued, "the reason my wife refused for so long to marry me. It is hard to believe, perhaps, but it is true. Another man wished to make her

his wife, and she would not consent to marry me until that other man was dead. Quixotic, absurd, unreasonable? If you like. I'll tell you what she said." He looked up with a significant expression in his face which proved that he, at least, did not now judge her reason foolish. "'Because it would be murder,' she told me. 'Another man who wants to marry me would kill you.'"

"She had some proof for the assertion, no doubt?" suggested Lawson.

"None whatever," was the reply. "Merely her woman's instinct. Moreover, *I* did not know who the other man was, nor would she ever tell me."

"Otherwise you might have murdered him instead?" said Baynes, the second listener.

"I did," said Ericssen grimly. "But without knowing he was the man." He sipped his whisky and relit his pipe. The others waited.

"Our marriage took place two months later—just after Hazel's disappearance."

"Hazel?" exclaimed Lawson and Baynes in a single breath. "Hazel! Member of the Hunters!" His mysterious disappearance had been a nine days' wonder some ten years ago. It had never been explained. They had all been members of the Hunters' Club together.

"That's the chap," Ericssen said. "Now I'll tell you the tale, if you care to hear it." They settled back in their chairs to listen, and Ericssen, who had evidently never told the affair to another living soul except his own

wife, doubtless, seemed glad this time to tell it to two men.

"It began some dozen years ago when my brother Jack and I came home from a shooting trip in China. I've often told you about our adventures there, and you see the heads hanging up here in the smoking-room—some of 'em." He glanced round proudly at the walls. "We were glad to be in town again after two years' roughing it, and we looked forward to our first good dinner at the Club, to make up for the rotten cooking we had endured so long. We had ordered that dinner in anticipatory detail many a time together. Well, we had it and enjoyed it up to a point—the point of the *entrée*, to be exact.

"Up to that point it was delicious, and we let ourselves go, I can tell you. We had ordered the very wine we had planned months before when we were snow-bound and half starving in the mountains." He smacked his lips as he mentioned it. "I was just starting on a beautifully cooked grouse," he went on, "when a figure went by our table, and Jack looked up and nodded. The two exchanged a brief word of greeting and explanation, and the other man passed on. Evidently they knew each other just enough to make a word or two necessary, but enough.

" 'Who's that?' I asked.

" 'A new member, named Hazel,' Jack told me. 'A great shot.' He knew him slightly, he explained; he had once been a client of his

—Jack was a barrister, you remember—and had defended him in some financial case or other. Rather an unpleasant case, he added. Jack did not ‘care about’ the fellow, he told me, as he went on with his tender wing of grouse.”

Ericssen paused to relight his pipe a moment.

“Not care about him!” he continued. “It didn’t surprise me, for my own feeling, the instant I set eyes on the fellow, was one of violent, instinctive dislike that amounted to loathing. Loathing! No. I’ll give it the right word—hatred. I simply couldn’t help myself; I hated the man from the very first go off. A wave of repulsion swept over me as I followed him down the room a moment with my eyes, till he took his seat at a distant table and was out of sight. Ugh! He was a big, fat-faced man, with an eyeglass glued into one of his pale-blue cod-like eyes—out of condition, ugly as a toad, with a smug expression of intense self-satisfaction on his jowl that made me long to——

“I leave it to you to guess what I would have liked to do to him. But the instinctive loathing he inspired in me had another aspect, too. Jack had not introduced us during the momentary pause beside our table, but as I looked up I caught the fellow’s eye on mine—he was glaring at me instead of at Jack, to whom he was talking—with an expression of malignant dislike, as keen evidently as my own. That’s the other aspect I meant. He hated me as violently as I hated him. We were instinctive enemies, just as the rat and ferret are instinctive enemies.

Each recognized a mortal foe. It was a case—I swear it—of whoever got first chance.”

“Bad as that!” exclaimed Baynes. “I knew him by sight. He wasn’t pretty, I’ll admit.”

“I knew him to nod to,” Lawson mentioned. “I never heard anything particular against him.” He shrugged his shoulders.

Ericssen went on. “It was not his character or qualities I hated,” he said. “I didn’t even know them. That’s the whole point. There’s no reason you fellows should have disliked him. *My* hatred—our mutual hatred—was instinctive, as instinctive as first love. A man knows his natural mate; also he knows his natural enemy. I did, at any rate, both with him and with my wife. Given the chance, Hazel would have done me in; just as surely, given the chance, I would have done him in. No blame to either of us, what’s more, in my opinion.”

“I’ve felt dislike, but never hatred like that,” Baynes mentioned. “I came across it in a book once, though. The writer did not mention the instinctive fear of the human animal for its natural enemy, or anything of that sort. He thought it was a continuance of a bitter feud begun in an earlier existence. He called it memory.”

“Possibly,” said Ericssen briefly. “My mind is not speculative. But I’m glad you spoke of fear. I left that out. The truth is, I feared the fellow, too, in a way; and had we ever met face to face in some wild country without witnesses I should have felt justified in drawing on him at

sight, and he would have felt the same. Murder? If you like. I should call it self-defence. Anyhow, the fellow polluted the room for me. He spoilt the enjoyment of that dinner we had ordered months before in China."

"But you saw him again, of course, later?"

"Lots of times. Not that night, because we went on to a theatre. But in the Club we were always running across one another—in the houses of friends at lunch or dinner; at race-meetings; all over the place; in fact, I even had some trouble to avoid being introduced to him. And every time we met, our eyes betrayed us. He felt in his heart what I felt in mine. Ugh! He was as loathsome to me as leprosy, and as dangerous. Odd, isn't it? The most intense feeling, except love, I've ever known. I remember"—he laughed gruffly—"I used to feel quite sorry for him. If he felt what I felt, and I'm convinced he did, he must have suffered. His one object—to get me out of the way for good—was so impossible. Then Fate played a hand in the game. I'll tell you how.

"My brother died a year or two later, and I went abroad to try and forget it. I went salmon fishing in Canada. But, though the sport was good, it was not like the old times with Jack. The camp never felt the same without him. I missed him badly. But I forgot Hazel for the time; hating did not seem worth while, somehow.

"When the best of the fishing was over on the Atlantic side I took a run back to Vancouver

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and fished there for a bit. I went up the Campbell River, which was not so crowded then as it is now, and had some rattling sport. Then I grew tired of the rod and decided to go after wapiti for a change. I came back to Victoria and learned what I could about the best places, and decided finally to go up the west coast of the island. By luck I happened to pick up a good guide, who was in the town at the moment on business, and we started off together in one of the little Canadian Pacific Railway boats that ply along that coast.

“Outfitting two days later at a small place the steamer stopped at, the guide said we needed another man to help pack our kit over portages, and so forth, but the only fellow available was a Siwash of whom he disapproved. My guide would not have him at any price; he was lazy, a drunkard, a liar, and even worse, for on one occasion he came back without the sportsman he had taken up country on a shooting trip, and his story was not convincing, to say the least. These disappearances are always awkward, of course, as you both know. We preferred, anyhow, to go without the Siwash, and off we started.

“At first our luck was bad. I saw many wapiti, but no good heads; only after a fortnight's hunting did I manage to get a decent head, though even that was not so good as I should have liked.

“We were then near the head waters of a little river that ran down into the Inlet; heavy

rains had made the river rise; running downstream was a risky job, what with old log-jams shifting and new ones forming; and, after many narrow escapes, we upset one afternoon and had the misfortune to lose a lot of our kit, amongst it most of our cartridges. We could only muster a few between us. The guide had a dozen; I had two—just enough, we considered, to take us out all right. Still, it was an infernal nuisance. We camped at once to dry out our soaked things in front of a big fire, and while this laundry work was going on the guide suggested my filling in the time by taking a look at the next little valley, which ran parallel to ours. He had seen some good heads over there a few weeks ago. Possibly I might come upon the herd. I started at once, taking my two cartridges with me.

“It was the devil of a job getting over the divide, for it was a badly bushed-up place, and where there were no bushes there were boulders and fallen trees, and the going was slow and tiring. But I got across at last and came out upon another stream at the bottom of the new valley. Signs of wapiti were plentiful, though I never came up with a single beast all the afternoon. Blacktail deer were everywhere, but the wapiti remained invisible. Providence, or whatever you like to call that fate which there is no escaping in our lives, made me save my two cartridges.”

Ericssen stopped a minute then. It was not to light his pipe or sip his whisky. Nor was it

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because the remainder of his story failed in the recollection of any vivid detail. He paused a moment to think.

"Tell us the lot," pleaded Lawson. "Don't leave out anything."

Ericssen looked up. His friend's remark had helped him to make up his mind apparently. He *had* hesitated about something or other, but the hesitation passed. He glanced at both his listeners.

"Right," he said. "I'll tell you everything. I'm not imaginative, as you know, and my amount of superstition, I should judge, is microscopic." He took a longer breath, then lowered his voice a trifle. "Anyhow," he went on, "it's true, so I don't see why I should feel shy about admitting it—but as I stood there, in that lonely valley, where only the noises of wind and water were audible, and no human being, except my guide, some miles away, was within reach, a curious feeling came over me I find difficult to describe. I felt"—obviously he made an effort to get the word out—"I felt creepy."

"You," murmured Lawson, with an incredulous smile—"you creepy?" he repeated under his breath.

"I felt creepy and afraid," continued the other, with conviction. "I had the sensation of being seen by someone—as if someone, I mean, was watching me. It was so unlikely that anyone was near me in that God-forsaken bit of wilderness that I simply couldn't believe it at first. But the feeling persisted. I felt absolutely

positive somebody was not far away among the red maples, behind a boulder, across the little stream, perhaps—somewhere, at any rate, so near that I was plainly visible to him. It was not an animal. It was human. Also, it was hostile.

“I was in danger.

“You may laugh, both of you, but I assure you the feeling was so positive that I crouched down instinctively to hide myself behind a rock. My first thought, that the guide had followed me for some reason or other, I at once discarded. It was not the guide. It was an enemy.

“No, no, I thought of no one in particular. No name, no face occurred to me. Merely that an enemy was on my trail, that he saw me, and I did not see him, and that he was near enough to me to—well, to take instant action. This deep instinctive feeling of danger, of fear, of anything you like to call it, was simply overwhelming.

“Another curious detail I must also mention. About half an hour before, having given up all hope of seeing wapiti, I had decided to kill a blacktail deer for meat. A good shot offered itself, not thirty yards away. I aimed. But just as I was going to pull the trigger a queer emotion touched me, and I lowered the rifle. It was exactly as though a voice said, ‘Don’t!’ I heard no voice, mind you; it was an emotion only, a feeling, a sudden inexplicable change of mind—a warning, if you like. I didn’t fire, anyhow.

“But now, as I crouched behind that rock, I

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remembered this curious little incident, and was glad I had not used up my last two cartridges. More than that I cannot tell you. Things of that kind are new to me. They're difficult enough to tell, let alone to explain. But they were *real*.

"I crouched there, wondering what on earth was happening to me, and feeling a bit of a fool, if you want to know, when suddenly, over the top of the boulder, I saw something moving. It was a man's hat. I peered cautiously. Some sixty yards away the bushes parted, and two men came out on to the river's bank, and I knew them both. One was the Siwash I had seen at the store. The other was Hazel. Before I had time to think I cocked my rifle."

"Hazel. Good Lord!" exclaimed the listeners.

"For a moment I was too surprised to do anything but cock that rifle. I waited, for what puzzled me was that, after all, Hazel had *not* seen me. It was only the feeling of his beastly proximity that had made me feel I was seen and watched by him. There was something else, too, that made me pause before—er—doing anything. Two other things, in fact. One was that I was so intensely interested in watching the fellow's actions. Obviously he had the same uneasy sensation that I had. He shared with me the nasty feeling that danger was about. His rifle, I saw, was cocked and ready; he kept looking behind him, over his shoulder, peering this way and that, and sometimes addressing a

remark to the Siwash at his side. I caught the laughter of the latter. The Siwash evidently did not think there was danger anywhere. It was, of course, unlikely enough——”

“And the other thing that stopped you?” urged Lawson, impatiently interrupting.

Ericssen turned with a look of grim humour on his face.

“Some confounded or perverted sense of chivalry in me, I suppose,” he said, “that made it impossible to shoot him down in cold blood, or, rather, without letting him have a chance. For my blood, as a matter of fact, was far from cold at the moment. Perhaps, too, I wanted the added satisfaction of letting him know who fired the shot that was to end his vile existence.”

He laughed again. “It was rat and ferret in the human kingdom,” he went on, “but I wanted my rat to have a chance, I suppose. Anyhow, though I had a perfect shot in front of me at easy distance, I did not fire. Instead I got up, holding my cocked rifle ready, finger on trigger, and came out of my hiding-place. I called to him. ‘Hazel, you beast! So there you are—at last!’

“He turned, but turned away from me, offering his horrid back. The direction of the voice he misjudged. He pointed down-stream, and the Siwash turned to look. Neither of them had seen me yet. There was a big log-jam below them. The roar of the water in their ears concealed my footsteps. I was, perhaps, twenty paces from them when Hazel, with a

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jerk of his whole body, abruptly turned clean round and faced me. We stared into each other's eyes.

"The amazement on his face changed instantly to hatred and resolve. He acted with incredible rapidity. I think the unexpected suddenness of his turn made me lose a precious second or two. Anyhow he was ahead of me. He flung his rifle to his shoulder. 'You devil!' I heard his voice. 'I've got you at last!' His rifle cracked, for he let drive the same instant. The hair stirred just above my ear.

"He had missed!

"Before he could draw back his bolt for another shot I had acted.

"'You're not fit to live!' I shouted, as my bullet crashed into his temple. I had the satisfaction, too, of knowing that he heard my words. I saw the swift expression of frustrated loathing in his eyes.

"He fell like an ox, his face splashing in the stream. I shoved the body out. I saw it sucked beneath the log-jam instantly. It disappeared. There could be no inquest on him, I reflected comfortably. Hazel was gone—gone from this earth, from my life, our mutual hatred over at last."

The speaker paused a moment. "Odd," he continued presently—"very odd indeed." He turned to the others. "I felt quite sorry for him suddenly. I suppose," he added, "the philosophers are right when they gas about hate being very close to love."

His friends contributed no remark.

"Then I came away," he resumed shortly. "My wife—well, you know the rest, don't you? I told her the whole thing. She—she said nothing. But she married me, you see."

There was a moment's silence. Baynes was the first to break it. "But—the Siwash?" he asked. "The witness?"

Lawson turned upon him with something of contemptuous impatience.

"He told you he had *two* cartridges."

Ericssen, smiling grimly, said nothing at all.

From "The Wolves of God"

THE OLIVE

HE laughed involuntarily as the olive rolled toward his chair across the shiny parquet floor of the hotel dining-room.

His table in the cavernous *salle à manger* was apart: he sat alone, a solitary guest; the table from which the olive fell and rolled toward him was some distance away. The angle, however, made him an unlikely objective. Yet the lob-sided, juicy thing, after hesitating once or twice *en route* as it plopped along, came to rest finally against his feet.

It settled with an inviting, almost an aggressive, air. And he stooped and picked it up, putting it rather self-consciously, because of the girl from whose table it had come, on the white tablecloth beside his plate.

Then, looking up, he caught her eye, and saw that she, too, was laughing, though not a bit self-consciously. As she helped herself to the *bors-d'œuvre* a false move had sent it flying. She watched him pick the olive up and set it beside his plate. Her eyes then suddenly looked away again—at her mother—questioningly.

The incident was closed. But the little oblong, succulent olive lay beside his plate, so that his fingers played with it. He fingered it

automatically from time to time until his lonely meal was finished.

When no one was looking he slipped it into his pocket, as though, having taken the trouble to pick it up, this was the very least he could do with it. Heaven alone knows why, but he then took it upstairs with him, setting it on the marble mantelpiece among his field-glasses, tobacco tins, ink-bottles, pipes, and candlestick. At any rate, he kept it—the moist, shiny, lob-sided, juicy little oblong olive. The hotel lounge wearied him; he came to his room after dinner to smoke at his ease, his coat off and his feet on a chair; to read another chapter of Freud, to write a letter or two he didn't in the least want to write, and then to go to bed at ten o'clock. But this evening the olive kept rolling between him and the thing he read; it rolled between the paragraphs, between the lines; the olive was more vital than the interest of these eternal 'complexes' and 'suppressed desires.'

The truth was that he kept seeing the eyes of the laughing girl beyond the bouncing olive. She had smiled at him in such a natural, spontaneous, friendly way before her mother's glance had checked her—a smile, he felt, that might lead to acquaintance on the morrow.

He wondered! A thrill of possible adventure ran through him.

She was a merry-looking sort of girl, with a happy, half-roguish face that seemed on the look-out for somebody to play with. Her mother, like most of the people in the big hotel,

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was an invalid; the girl, a dutiful and patient daughter. They had arrived that very day, apparently.

A laugh is a revealing thing, he thought as he fell asleep, to dream of a lob-sided olive rolling consciously toward him, and of a girl's eyes that watched its awkward movements, then looked up into his own and laughed. In his dream the olive had been deliberately and cleverly dispatched upon its uncertain journey. It was a message.

He did not know, of course, that the mother, chiding her daughter's awkwardness, had muttered:

"There you are again, child! True to your name, you never see an olive without doing something queer and odd with it!"

A youngish man, whose knowledge of chemistry, including invisible inks and suchlike mysteries, had proved so valuable to the Censor's Department that for five years he had overworked without a holiday, the Italian Riviera had attracted him, and he had come out for a two months' rest. It was his first visit. Sun, mimosa, blue seas and brilliant skies had tempted him; exchange made a pound worth forty, fifty, sixty, and seventy shillings. He found the place lovely, but somewhat untenanted.

He stayed on, however, caught by the sunshine and the good exchange, also without the physical energy to discover a better, livelier place. He went for walks among the olive-groves; he sat beside the sea and palms; he visited shops

and bought things he did not want because the exchange made them seem cheap; he paid immense 'extras' in his weekly bill, then chuckled as he reduced them to shillings and found that a few pence covered them; he lay with a book for hours among the olive-groves.

The olive-groves! His daily life could not escape the olive-groves; to olive-groves, sooner or later, his walks, his expeditions, his meanderings by the sea, his shopping—all led him to these ubiquitous olive-groves.

If he bought a picture postcard to send home, there was sure to be an olive-grove in one corner of it. The whole place was smothered with olive-groves, the people owed their incomes and existence to these irrepressible trees. The villages among the hills swam roof-deep in them. They swarmed even in the hotel gardens.

The guide-books praised them as persistently as the residents brought them, sooner or later, into every conversation. They grew lyrical over them:

"And how do you like our olive-trees? Ah, you think them pretty. At first, most people are disappointed. 'They grow on one.'"

"They do," he agreed.

"I'm glad you appreciate them. I find them the embodiment of grace. And when the wind lifts the underleaves across a whole mountain slope—why, it's wonderful, isn't it? One realizes the meaning of 'olive-green.'"

"One does." He sighed. "But, all the same, I should like to get one to eat—an olive, I mean."

"Ah, to eat, yes. That's not so easy. You see, the crop is . . ."

"Exactly," he interrupted impatiently, weary of the habitual and evasive explanations. "But I should like to taste the *fruit*. I should like to enjoy one."

For, after a stay of six weeks, he had never once seen an olive on the table, in the shops, nor even on the street barrows at the market-place. He had never tasted one. No one sold olives, though olive-trees were a drug in the place; no one bought them, no one asked for them; it seemed that no one wanted them. The trees, when he looked closely, were thick with a dark little berry that seemed more like a sour sloe than the succulent, delicious, spicy fruit associated with its name.

Men climbed the trunks, everywhere shaking the laden branches and hitting them with long bamboo poles to knock the fruit off, while women and children, squatting on their haunches, spent laborious hours filling baskets underneath, then loading mules and donkeys with their daily 'catch.' But an olive to eat was unobtainable. He had never cared for olives, but now he craved with all his soul to feel his teeth in one.

"Ach! But it is the Spanish olive that you *eat*," explained the head waiter, a German "from Basel." "These are for oil only." After which he disliked the olive more than ever—until that night when he saw the first eatable specimen rolling across the shiny parquet floor, propelled

toward him by the careless hand of a pretty girl, who then looked up into his eyes and smiled.

He was convinced that Eve, similarly, had rolled the apple toward Adam across the emerald sward of the first garden in the world. The dull, accumulated resentment he had come to feel, subconsciously perhaps, against an elusive fruit was changed in the twinkling of an eye into a source of joy, a symbol of romance.

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He slept usually like the dead. It must have been something very real that made him open his eyes and sit up in bed alertly. There was a noise against his door. He listened. The room was still quite dark. It was early morning. The noise was not repeated.

"Who's there?" he asked in a sleepy whisper. "What is it?"

The noise came again. Someone was scratching on the door. No, it was somebody tapping.

"What d'you want?" he demanded in a louder voice. "Come in," he added, wondering sleepily whether he was presentable. Either the hotel was on fire or the porter was waking the wrong person for some sunrise expedition.

Nothing happened. Wide awake now, he turned the switch on, but no light flooded the room. The electricians, he remembered with a curse, were out on strike. He fumbled for the matches, and as he did so a voice in the corridor became distinctly audible. It was just outside his door.

"Aren't you ready?" he heard. "You sleep for ever."

And the voice, although, never having heard it before, he could not have recognized it, belonged, he knew suddenly, to the girl who had let the olive fall. In an instant he was out of bed. He lit a candle.

"I'm coming," he called softly, as he slipped rapidly into some clothes. "I'm sorry I've kept you. I shan't be a minute."

"Be quick then!" he heard, while the candle-flame slowly grew, and he found his garments. Less than three minutes later he opened the door and, candle in hand, peered into the dark passage.

"Blow it out!" came a peremptory whisper. He obeyed, but not quick enough. A pair of red lips emerged from the shadows. There was a puff, and the candle was extinguished. "I've got my reputation to consider. We mustn't be seen, of course!"

The face vanished in the darkness, but he had recognized it—the shining skin, the bright, glancing eyes. The sweet breath touched his cheek. The candlestick was taken from him by a swift, deft movement. He heard it knock the wainscoting as it was set down. He went out into a pitch-black corridor, where a soft hand seized his own and led him—by a back-door, it seemed—out into the open air of the hillside immediately behind the hotel.

He saw the stars. The morning was cool and fragrant, the sharp air waked him, and the last

vestiges of sleep went flying. He had been drowsy and confused, had obeyed the summons without thinking. He now realized suddenly that he was engaged in an act of madness.

The girl, dressed in some flimsy material thrown loosely about her head and body, stood a few feet away, looking, he thought, like some figure called out of dreams and slumber of a forgotten world, out of legend almost. He saw her evening shoes peep out; he divined an evening dress beneath the gauzy covering. The light wind blew it close against her figure. He thought of a nymph.

"I say—but haven't you been to bed?" he asked stupidly.

He had meant to expostulate, to apologize for his foolish rashness, to scold and say they must go back at once. Instead, this sentence came. He guessed she had been sitting up all night. He stood still a second, staring in mute admiration, his eyes full of bewildered question.

"Watching the stars," she met his thought with a happy laugh. "Orion has touched the horizon. I came for you at once. We've got just four hours!" The voice, the smile, the eyes, the reference to Orion, swept him off his feet. Something in him broke loose and flew wildly, recklessly to the stars.

"Let us be off!" he cried, "before the Bear tilts down. Already Alcyone begins to fade. I'm ready. Come!"

She laughed. The wind blew the gauze aside to show two ivory-white limbs. She

caught his hand again, and they scampered together up the steep hillside toward the woods. Soon the big hotel, the villas, the white houses of the little town where natives and visitors still lay soundly sleeping, were out of sight. The farther sky came down to meet them. The stars were paling, but no sign of actual dawn was yet visible. The freshness stung their cheeks. Slowly, the heavens grew lighter, the east turned rose, the outline of the trees defined themselves, there was a stirring of the silvery-green leaves. They were among olive-groves—but the spirits of the trees were dancing. Far below them, a pool of deep colour, they saw the ancient sea. They saw the tiny specks of distant fishing-boats. The sailors were singing to the dawn, and birds among the mimosa of the hanging gardens answered them.

Pausing a moment at length beneath a gaunt old tree, whose struggle to leave the clinging earth had tortured its great writhing arms and trunk, they took their breath, gazing at one another with eyes full of happy dreams.

“You understood so quickly,” said the girl, “my little message. I knew by your eyes and ears you would.” And she first tweaked his ears with two slender fingers mischievously, then laid her soft palm with a momentary light pressure on both eyes.

“You’re half-and-half, at any rate,” she went on, looking him up and down for a swift instant of appraisal, “if you’re not altogether.” The laughter showed her white, even little teeth.

"You know how to play, and that's something," she added. Then, as if to herself, "You'll be altogether before I've done with you."

"Shall I?" he stammered, afraid to look at her.

Puzzled, some spirit of compromise still lingering in him, he knew not what she meant; he knew only that the current of life flowed increasingly through his veins, but that her eyes confused him.

"I'm longing for it," he added. "How wonderfully you did it! They roll so awkwardly——"

"Oh, that!" She peered at him through a wisp of hair. "You've kept it, I hope."

"Rather. It's on my mantelpiece——"

"You're sure you haven't eaten it?" and she made a delicious mimicry with her red lips, so that he saw the tip of a small, pointed tongue.

"I shall keep it," he swore, "as long as these arms have life in them," and he seized her just as she was crouching to escape, and covered her with kisses.

"I knew you longed to play," she panted, when he released her. "Still, it was sweet of you to pick it up before another got it."

"Another!" he exclaimed.

"The gods decide. It's a lob-sided thing, remember. It can't roll straight." She looked oddly mischievous, elusive.

He stared at her.

"If it had rolled elsewhere—and another had picked it up——?" he began.

"I should be with that other now!" And this time she was off and away before he could prevent her, and the sound of her silvery laughter mocked him among the olive-trees beyond. He was up and after her in a second, following her slim whiteness in and out of the old-world grove, as she flitted lightly, her hair flying in the wind, her figure flashing like a ray of sunlight or the race of foaming water—till at last he caught her and drew her down upon his knees, and kissed her wildly, forgetting who and where and what he was.

"Hark!" she whispered breathlessly, one arm close about his neck. "I hear their footsteps. Listen! It is the pipe!"

"The pipe——!" he repeated, conscious of a tiny but delicious shudder.

For a sudden chill ran through him as she said it. He gazed at her. Her hair fell loose about her cheeks, flushed and rosy with his hot kisses. Her eyes were bright and wild for all their softness. Her face, turned sideways to him as she listened, wore an extraordinary look that for an instant made his blood run cold. He saw the parted lips, the small white teeth, the slim neck of ivory, the young bosom panting from his tempestuous embrace. Of an unearthly loveliness and brightness she seemed to him, yet with this strange, remote expression that touched his soul with sudden terror.

Her face turned slowly.

"Who *are* you?" he whispered. He sprang to his feet without waiting for her answer.

He was young and agile; strong, too, with that quick response of muscle they have who keep their bodies well; but he was no match for her. Her speed and agility outclassed his own with ease. She leaped. Before he had moved one leg forward toward escape, she was clinging with soft, supple arms and limbs about him, so that he could not free himself, and as her weight bore him downward to the ground her lips found his own and kissed them into silence. She lay buried again in his embrace, her hair across his eyes, her heart against his heart, and he forgot his question, forgot his little fear, forgot the very world he knew. . . .

"They come, they come," she cried gaily. "The Dawn is here. Are you ready?"

"I've been ready for five thousand years," he answered, leaping to his feet beside her.

"Altogether!" came upon a sparkling laugh that was like wind among the olive-leaves.

Shaking her last gauzy covering from her, she snatched his hand, and they ran forward together to join the dancing throng now crowding up the slope beneath the trees. Their happy singing filled the sky. Decked with vine and ivy, and trailing silvery-green branches, they poured in a flood of radiant life along the mountain-side. Slowly they melted away into the blue distance of the breaking dawn, and, as the last figure disappeared, the sun came up slowly out of a purple sea. . . .

They came to the place he knew—the deserted earthquake village—and a faint memory stirred

in him. He did not actually recall that he had visited it already, had eaten his sandwiches with 'hotel friends' beneath its crumbling walls; but there was a dim troubling sense of familiarity—nothing more. The houses still stood, but pigeons lived in them, and weasels, stoats, and snakes had their uncertain homes in ancient bedrooms. Not twenty years ago the peasants thronged its narrow streets, through which the dawn now peered and cool wind breathed among dew-laden brambles.

"I know the house," she cried, "the house where we would live!" and raced, a flying form of air and sunlight, into a tumbled cottage that had no roof, no floor or windows. Wild bees had hung a nest against the broken wall.

He followed her. There was sunlight in the room, and there were flowers. Upon a rude, simple table lay a bowl of cream, with eggs, and honey and butter close against a home-made loaf. They sank into each other's arms upon a couch of fragrant grass and boughs against the window where wild roses bloomed . . . and the bees flew in and out.

It was Bussana, the so-called earthquake village, because a sudden earthquake had fallen on it one summer morning when all the inhabitants were at church. The crashing roof killed sixty, the tumbling walls another hundred, and the rest had left it where it stood.

"The church," he said, vaguely remembering the story. "They were at prayer——"

The girl laughed carelessly in his ear, setting

his blood in a rush and quiver of delicious joy. He felt himself untamed, wild as the wind and animals. "The true God claimed His own," she whispered. "He came back. Ah, they were not ready—the old priests had seen to that. But He came. They heard His music. Then His tread shook the olive-groves, the old ground danced, the hills leapt for joy——"

"They called it earthquake! And the houses crumbled," he laughed as he pressed her closer to his heart.

"And now we've come back!" she cried merrily. "We've come back to worship and be glad!" She nestled into him, while the sun rose higher. "I hear them—hark!" she cried, and again leapt, dancing, from his side. Again he followed her like wind. Through the broken window they saw the naked fauns and nymphs and satyrs rolling, dancing, shaking their soft hoofs amid the ferns and brambles. Toward the ruptured church they sped with feet of light and air. A roar of happy song and laughter rose.

"Come!" he cried. "We must go too."

Hand in hand they raced to join the tumbling, dancing throng. She was in his arms and on his back and flung across his shoulders as he ran. They reached the broken building, its whole roof gone sliding years ago, its walls atremble still, its shattered shrines alive with nestling birds.

"Hush!" she whispered, in a tone of awe, yet pleasure. "*He* is there!" She pointed,

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her bare arm outstretched, above the bending heads.

There, in the empty space, where once stood sacred Host and cup, He sat, filling the niche sublimely and with awful power. His shaggy form, benign yet terrible, rose through the broken stone. The great eyes shone and smiled. The feet were lost in brambles. . . .

"God!" cried a wild, frightened voice, yet with deep worship in it—and the old familiar panic came with portentous swiftness. The great Figure rose.

The birds flew screaming, the animals sought holes, the worshippers, laughing and glad a moment ago, rushed tumbling over one another for the doors.

"He goes again! Who called? Who called like that? His feet shake the ground!"

"It is the earthquake!" screamed a woman's shrill accents in ghastly terror.

"Kiss me—one kiss before we forget again! . . ." sighed a laughing, passionate voice against his ear. "Once more your arms, your heart beating on my lips . . . ! You recognized His power. You are now *altogether*! We shall remember!"

But he woke, with the heavy bedclothes stuffed against his mouth and the wind of early morning sighing mournfully about the hotel walls.

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"Have they left again—those ladies?" he inquired casually of the head waiter, pointing

to the table. "They were here last night at dinner."

"Who do you mean?" replied the man stupidly, gazing at the spot indicated with a face quite blank. "Last night—at dinner?" He tried to think.

"An English lady, elderly, with—her daughter——" at which moment precisely the girl came in alone. Lunch was over, the room empty.

There was a second's difficult pause. It seemed ridiculous not to speak. Their eyes met. The girl blushed furiously.

He was very quick for an Englishman. "I was allowing myself to ask after your mother," he began. "I was afraid"—he glanced at the table laid for one—"she was not well, perhaps?"

"Oh, but that's very kind of you, I'm sure." She smiled. He saw the small white even teeth. . . .

And before three days had passed he was so deeply in love that he simply couldn't help himself.

"I believe," he said lamely, "this is yours. You dropped it, you know. Er—may I keep it? It's only an olive."

They were, of course, in an olive-grove when he asked it, and the sun was setting.

She looked at him, looked him up and down, looked at his ears, his eyes. He felt that in another second her little fingers would slip up and tweak the first or close the second with a soft pressure——

THE OLIVE

"Tell me," he begged: "did you dream anything—that first night I saw you?"

She took a quick step backward. "No," she said, as he followed her more quickly still, "I don't think I did. But," she went on breathlessly as he caught her up, "I knew—from the way you picked it up——"

"Knew what?" he demanded, holding her tightly so that she could not get away again.

"That you were already half and half, but would soon be altogether."

And, as he kissed her, he felt her soft fingers tweak his ears.

From "Tongues of Fire"

TWO IN ONE

SOME idle talker, playing with half-truths, Shad once told him that he was too self-centred to fall in love—out of himself; he was unwilling to lose himself in another; and that was the reason he had never married. But Le Maître was not really more of an egoist than is necessary to make a useful man. A too selfless person is ever ineffective. The suggestion, nevertheless, had remained to distress, for he was no great philosopher—merely a writer of successful tales—tales of wild Nature chiefly; the “human interest” (a publisher’s term) was weak; the great divine enigma of an undeveloped soul—certainly of a lover’s or a woman’s soul—had never claimed his attention enough, perhaps. He was somewhat too much detached from human life. Nature had laid so powerful a spell upon his heart. . . .

“I hope she won’t be late,” ran the practical thought across his mind as he waited that early Sunday morning in the Great Central Station and reflected that it was the cleanest, brightest, and most airy terminus of all London. He had promised her the whole day out—a promise somewhat long neglected. He was not conscious of doing an unselfish act, yet on the whole,

probably, he would rather—or just as soon—have been alone.

The air was fragrant, and the sunshine blazed in soft white patches on the line. The maddening loveliness of an exceptional spring danced everywhere into his heart. Yes, he rather wished he were going off into the fields and woods alone, instead of with her. Only—she was really a dear person, more, far more now, than secretary and typist; more, even, than the devoted girl who had nursed him through that illness. A friend she was; the years of their working together had made her that; and she was wise and gentle. Oh, yes; it would be delightful to have her with him. How she would enjoy the long sunny day.

Then he saw her coming toward him through the station. In a patch of sunshine she came, as though the light produced her—came suddenly from the middle of a group of men in flannels carrying golf-sticks. And he smiled his welcome a little paternally, trying to kill the selfish thought that he would rather have been alone. Soft things fluttered about her. The big hat was becoming. She was dressed in brown, he believed.

He bought a Sunday paper. "I must buy one too," she laughed. She chose one with pictures, chose it at random rather. He had never heard its name even. And in a first-class carriage alone—he meant to do it really well—they raced through a world of sunshine and brilliant fields to Amersham. She was very

happy. She tried every seat in turn; the blazing sheets of yellow—such a spring for buttercups there had never been—drew her from side to side. She put her head out, and nearly lost her big hat, and that soft fluttering thing she wore streamed behind her like the colour of escaping flowers. She opened both windows. The very carriage held the perfume of may that floated over the whole country-side.

He was very nice to her, but read his paper—though always ready with a smile and answer when she asked for them. She teased and laughed and chattered. The luncheon packages engaged her serious attention. Never for a moment was she still, trying every corner in turn, putting her feet up, and bouncing to enjoy the softness of the first-class cushions. “You’ll be sitting in the rack next,” he suggested. But her head was out of the window again and she did not hear him. She was radiant as a child. His paper interested him—book reviews or something. “I’ve asked you that three times, you know, already,” he heard her laughing opposite. And with a touch of shame he tossed the paper through the window. “There! I’d quite forgotten her again!” he thought, with a touch of shame. “I must pull myself together.” For it was true. He had for the moment—more than once—forgotten her existence, just as though he really were alone.

Together they strolled down through the beech-wood toward Amersham, he for ever

dropping the luncheon packages, which she picked up again and tried to stuff into his pockets. For she refused to carry anything at all. "It's *my* day out, not yours, remember! I do no work to-day!" And he caught her happiness, pausing to watch her while she picked flowers and leaves and all the rest, and disentangling without the least impatience that soft fluttering thing she wore when it caught in thorns, and even talking with her about this wild spring glory as though she were just the companion that he needed out of all the world. He no longer felt quite so conscious of her objective presence as at first. In the train, for instance, he had felt so vividly aware that she was there. Alternately he had forgotten and remembered her presence. Now it was better. They were more together, as it were. "I wish I were alone," he thought once more as the beauty of the spring called to him tumultuously and he longed to lie and dream it all, unhampered by another's presence. Then, even while thinking it, realized that he was—alone. It was curious.

This happened even in their first wood when they went downhill into Amersham. As they left it and passed again into the open it came. And on its heels, as he watched her moving here and there light-footed as a child or nymph, there came this other instinctive thought—"I wish I were ten years younger than I am!"—the first time in all his life, probably, that such a thought had ever bothered him. Apparently he said it aloud, laughingly, as he watched her

dancing movements. For she turned and ran up to his side quickly, her little face quite grave beneath the big hat's rim. "You *are*!" That answer struck him as rather wonderful. Who was she after all . . . ?

And in Amersham they hired from the Griffin a rickety old cart, drawn by a still more rickety horse, to drive them to Penn's Wood. She, with her own money, bought stone-bottle ginger-beer—two bottles. It made her day complete to have those bottles, though unless they had driven she would have done without them. The street was deserted, drenched in blazing sunshine. Rooks were cawing in the elms behind the church. Not a soul was about as they crawled away from the houses and passed upward between hedges smothered in cow-parsley over the hill. She had kept her picture paper. It lay on her lap all the way. She never opened it or turned a single page; but she held it in her lap. They drove in silence. The old man on the box was like a faded, weather-beaten farmer dressed in somebody else's cast-off Sunday coat. He flicked the horse with a tattered whip. Sometimes he grunted. Plover rose from the fields, cuckoos called, butterflies danced sideways past the carriage, eyeing them . . . and, as they passed through Penn Street, Le Maître started suddenly and said something. For, again, he had quite forgotten she was there. "What a selfish beast I am! Why can't I forget myself and my own feelings, and look after her and make her feel amused and happy?"

It's *her* day out, not mine!" This, somehow, was the way he put it to himself, just as an ordinary man would have put it. But, when he turned to look at her, he received a shock. Here was something new and unexpected. With a thud it dropped down into his mind—crash!

For at the sound of his voice she looked up confused and startled into his face. She had forgotten *him*! For the first time in all the years together—years of work, of semi-official attention to his least desire, yet of personal devotion as well, because she respected him and thought him wonderful—she had forgotten *he* was there. She had forgotten his existence beside her as a separate person. She, too, had been—alone.

It was here, perhaps, he first realized this singular thing that set this day apart from every other day that he had ever known. In reality, of course, it had come far sooner—begun with the exquisite spring dawn before either of them was awake, had tentatively fluttered about his soul even while he stood waiting for her in the station, come softly nearer all the way in the train, dropped threads of its golden web about him, especially in that first beech-wood, then moved with its swifter yet unhurried rush—until, here, now, in this startling moment, he realized it fully. Thus steal those changes o'er the sky, perhaps, that the day itself knows at sunrise, but that unobservant folk do not notice till the sun bursts out with fuller explanation, and they

say, "The weather's changed; how delightful! how unexpected!" Le Maître had never been very observant—of people.

And then in this deep, lonely valley, too full of sunshine to hold anything else, it seemed, they stopped where the beech-woods trooped to the edge of the white road. No wind was here; it was still and silent; the leaves glittered, motionless. They entered the thick trees together, she carrying the ginger-beer bottles *and* that picture paper. He noticed that: the way she held it, almost clutched it, still unopened. Her face, he saw, was pale. Or was it merely the contrast of the shade? The trees were very big and wonderful. No birds sang; the network of dazzling sunshine-patches in the gloom bewildered a little.

At first they did not talk at all, and then in hushed voices. But it was only when they were some way into the wood, and she had put down the bottles—though not the paper—to pick a flower or spray of leaves, that he traced the singular secret thrill to its source and understood why he had felt—no, not uneasy, but so strangely moved. For he had asked the sleepy driver of the way, and how they might best reach Beaconsfield across Penn's Wood, and the old man's mumbled answer took no note of—her.

"It's a bit rough, maybe, on t'other side, stony-like and steep, but that ain't nothing for a gentleman—when he's alone . . . !"

The words disturbed him with a sense of

darkness, yet of wonder. As though the old man had not noticed her; almost as though he had seen only one person—himself. . . .

They lunched among heather and bracken just beside a pool of sunshine. In front lay a copse of pines, with little beeches in between. The roof was thick just there, the stillness haunting. All the country-side, it seemed, this Sunday noon, had gone to sleep, he and she alone left out of the deep, soft dream. He watched those pines, mothering the slim young beeches, the brilliant fresh greens of whose lower branches, he thought, were like little platforms of level sunlight amid the general gloom—patches that had left the ground to escape by the upper air and had then been caught.

“Look,” he heard, “they make one think of laughter crept in unawares among a lot of solemn monks—or of children lost among grave elder beings whose ways are dull and sombre!” It was his own thought continued . . . yet it was she, lying there beside him, who had said it. . . .

And all that wonderful afternoon she had this curious way of picking the thoughts out of his mind and putting them into words for him. “Look,” she said again later, “you can always tell whether the wind loves a tree or not by the way it blows the branches. If it loves them, it tries to draw them out to go away with it. The others it merely shakes carelessly as it passes!” It was the very thought in his own mind, too. Indeed, he had been on the point

of saying it, but had desisted, feeling she would not understand, with the half-wish—though far less strong than before—that he were alone to enjoy it all in his own indulgent way. Then, even more swiftly, came that other strange sensation that he *was* alone all the time; more—that he was for the first time in his life most wonderfully complete and happy, all sense of isolation gone.

He turned quickly the instant she had said it. But not quickly enough. By the look in her grey eyes, by the expression on the face where the discarded hat no longer hid it, he read the amazing enigma he had half divined before. She, too, was alone. She had forgotten him again—forgotten his presence—radiant and happy without him, enjoying herself in her own way. She had merely uttered her delightful thoughts aloud, as if speaking to herself!

How the afternoon, with its long sunny hours, passed so quickly away, he never understood, nor how they made their way eventually to Beaconsfield through other woods and over other meadows. He remembers only that the whole time he kept forgetting that she was with him, and then suddenly remembering it again. And once on the grass, when they rested to drink the cold tea from his rather musty flask, he lit his pipe, and after a bit he—dozed. He actually slept; for ten minutes at her side, yes, he slept. He heard her laughing at him, but the laughter was faint and very far away;

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it might just as well have been the wind in the cow-parsley that said, "If you sleep, I shall change you—change you while you sleep!" And for some minutes after he woke again it hardly seemed queer to him that he did not see her, for when he noticed her coming toward him from the hedgerow, her arms full of flowers and things, he only thought, "Oh, there she is"—as though her absence, or his own absence in sleep, were not quite the common absences of the world.

And he remembered that on the walk to the village her shoe hurt her, and he offered to carry her, and that then she took her shoe off and ran along the grass beside the lane the whole way. But it was at the inn where they had their supper that the oddest thing of all occurred, for the deaf and rather stupid servant-girl would insist on laying the table on the lawn for—one.

"Oh, expectin' someone, are yer?" she said at last. "Is that it?" and so brought plates and knives for two. The girl never once looked at his companion—almost as though she did not see her and seemed unaware of her presence. Le Maître began to feel that he was dreaming. This was a dream-country, where the people had curious sight. He remembered the driver. . . .

In the dusk they made their way to the station. They spoke no word. He kept losing sight of her. Once or twice he forgot who he was. But the whole amazing thing blazed into him

most strongly, showing how it had seized upon his mind, when he stood before the ticket-window and hesitated—for a second—how many tickets he should buy. He stammered at length for two first-class, but he was absurdly flustered for a second. It had actually occurred to him that they needed only one ticket. . . .

And suddenly in the train he understood—and his heart came up in his throat. They were alone. He turned to her where she lay in the corner, feet up, weary, crumpled among the leaves and flowers she had gathered. Like a hedgerow flower she looked, tired by the sunshine and the wind. In one hand was the picture paper, still unopened and unread, symbol of everyday reality. She was dozing certainly, if not actually asleep. So he woke her with a touch, calling her name aloud.

There were no words at first. He looked at her, coming up very close to do so, and she looked back at him—straight into his eyes—just as she did at home when they were working and he was explaining something important. And then her own eyes dropped, and a deep blush spread over all her face.

“I wasn’t asleep—really,” she said, as he took her at last into his arms; “I was wondering—when—you’d find out.”

“Come to myself, you mean?” he asked tremblingly.

TWO IN ONE

“Well,” she hesitated, as soon as she got breath, “that I *am* yourself—and that you are me. Of course, we’re really only one. I knew it years—oh, years and years ago. . . .”

From “Ten-minute Stories”

DREAM TRESPASS

THE little feathers of the dusk were drifting through the autumn leaves when we came so unexpectedly upon the inn that was not marked upon our big-scale map. And most opportunely, for Ducommun, my friend, was clearly overtired. Irritability foreign to his placid temperament had made the last few hours' trudge a little difficult, and I felt we had reached that narrow frontier which lies between non-success and failure.

"Another five miles to the inn we chose this morning," I told him; "but we'll soon manage it at a steady pace."

And he groaned, "I'm done! I simply couldn't do it."

He sank down upon the bit of broken wall to rest, while the darkness visibly increased, and the wind blew damp and chill across the marshes on our left. But behind the petulance of his tone, due to exhaustion solely, lay something else as well, something that had been accumulating for days. For our walking tour had not turned out quite to measure, distances always under-calculated; the inns, moreover, bad; the people surly and inhospitable; even the weather cross.

And Ducommun's disappointment had in a sense been double, so that I felt keen sympathy with him. For this was the country where his ancestors once reigned as proprietors, *grand seigneurs*, and the rest; he had always longed to visit it; and secretly in his imagination had cherished a reconstructed picture in which he himself would somehow play some high, distinguished *rôle* his proud blood entitled him to. Clerk to-day in a mere insurance office, but descendant of romantic, ancient stock, he knew the history of the period intimately; the holiday had been carefully, lovingly planned; and—the unpleasantness of the inhabitants had shattered his dream thus fostered and so keenly anticipated. The breaking-point had been reached. Was not this inn we hoped to reach by dark a portion of the very *château*—he had established it from musty records enough—where once his family dwelt in old-time splendour? And had he not indulged all manner of delightful secret dreaming in advance? . . .

It was here, then, returning from a little private reconnoitring on my own account, that I reported my brave discovery of an unexpected half-way house, and found him almost asleep upon the stones, unwilling to believe the short half-mile I promised. "Only another nest of robbery and insolence," he laughed sourly, "and, anyhow, not the inn we counted on." He dragged after me in silence, eyeing askance the tumbled, ivy-covered shanty that stood beside the roadway, yet gladly going in ahead of me to rest his weary

limbs, and troubling himself no whit with bargaining that he divined might be once more unpleasant.

Yet the inn proved a surprise in another way—it was entirely delightful. There was a glowing fire of peat in a biggish hall, the *patron* and his wife were all smiles and pleasure, welcoming us with an old-fashioned dignity that made bargaining impossible, and in ten minutes we felt as much at home as if we had arrived at a country house where we had been long expected.

“So few care to stop here now,” the old woman told us, with a gracious gesture that was courtly rather than deferential, “we stand no longer upon the old high road,” and showed in a hundred nameless ways that all they had was entirely at our disposal. Till even Ducommun melted and turned soft: “Only in France could this happen,” he whispered with a touch of pride, as though claiming that this fragrance of gentle life, now fast disappearing from the world, still lingered in the land of his descent and in his own blood too. He patted the huge, rough deer-hound that seemed to fill the little room where we awaited supper, and the friendly creature, bounding with a kind of subdued affection, added another touch of welcome. His face and manners were evidence of kind treatment; he was proud of his owners’ guests. I thought of well-loved pets in our English country houses. “This beast,” I laughed, “has surely lived with gentlemen.” And Ducommun

took the compliment to himself with personal satisfaction.

It is difficult to tell afterwards with accuracy the countless little touches that made the picture all so gentle—they were so delicately suggested, painted in silently with such deft spiritual discretion. It stands out in my memory, set in some strange, high light, as the most enchanting experience of many a walking tour; and yet, about it all, like a veil of wonder that evades description, an atmosphere of something at the same time—I use the best available word—truly singular. This touch of something remote, indefinite, unique, began to steal over me from the very first, bringing with it an incalculable, queer charm. It lulled like a drug all possible suspicions. And in my friend—detail of the picture nearest to my heart, that is—it first betrayed itself, with a degree of surprise, moreover, not entirely removed from shock.

For as he passed before me underneath that low-browed porch, quite undeniably he—altered. This indefinable change clothed his entire presentment to my eyes; to tired eyes, I freely grant, as also that it was dusk, and that the transforming magic of the peat fire was behind him. Yet eschewing paragraphs of vain description, I may put a portion of it crudely thus, perhaps: that his lankiness turned suddenly all grace; the atmosphere of the London office stool, as of the clerk a-holidaying, vanished; and that the way he bowed his head to enter the dark-beamed

lintel of the door was courtly and high bred, instinct with native elegance, and in the real sense aristocratic. It came with an instant and complete conviction. It was wonderful to see; and it gave me a moment's curious enchantment. All that I divined and loved in the man, usually somewhat buried, came forth upon the surface. A note of explanation followed readily enough, half-explanation at any rate—that houses alter people because, like dressing-up with women and children, they furnish a new setting to the general appearance, and the points one is accustomed to undergo a readjustment. Yet with him this subtle alteration did not pass; it not only clung to him during the entire evening, but most curiously increased. He maintained, indeed, his silence the whole time, but it was a happy, dreaming silence holding the charm of real companionship, his disappointment gone as completely as the memory of our former cheerless inns and ill-conditioned people.

I cannot pretend, though, that I really watched him carefully, since an attack from another quarter divided my attention equally, and the charm of the daughter of the house, in whose eyes, it seemed to me, lay all the quiet sadness of the country we had walked through—*triste, morne*, forsaken land—claimed a great part of my observant sympathy. The old people left us entirely to her care, and the way she looked after us, divining our wants before we ventured to express them, was more suggestive of the

perfect hostess than merely of someone who would take payment for all that she supplied. The question of money, indeed, did not once intrude, though I cannot say whence came my impression that this hospitality was, in fact, offered without the least idea of remuneration in silver and gold. That it did come, I can swear; also, that behind it lay no suggestion of stiff prices to be demanded at the last moment on the plea that terms had not been settled in advance. We were made welcome like expected guests, and my heart leaped to encounter this spirit of old-fashioned courtesy that the greed of modern life has everywhere destroyed.

"To-morrow or the next day, when you are rested," said the maiden softly, sitting beside us after supper and tending the fire, "I will take you through the *Allée des tilleuls* toward the river, and show you where the fishing is so good."

For it seemed natural that she should sit and chat with us, and only afterwards I remembered sharply that the river was a good five miles from where we housed, across marshes that could boast no trees at all, *tilleuls* least of all, and of avenues not a vestige anywhere.

"We'll start," Ducommun answered promptly, taking my breath a little, "in the dawn"; and presently then made signs to go to bed.

She brought candles, lit them for us with a spill of paper from the peat, and handed one to each, a little smile of yearning in her deep, soft eyes that I remember to this day.

"You will sleep long and well," she said half shyly, accompanying us to the foot of the stairs. "I made and aired the beds with my own hands."

The last I saw of her, as we turned the landing corner overhead, was her graceful figure against the darkness, with the candlelight falling upon the coiled masses of her dark-brown hair. She gazed up after us with those large grey eyes that seemed to me so full of yearning, and yet so sad, so patient, so curiously resigned. . . .

Ducommun pulled me almost roughly by the arm. "Come," he said with sudden energy, and as though everything was settled. "We have an early start, remember!"

I moved unwillingly; it was all so strange and dreamlike, the beauty of the girl so enchanting, the change in himself so utterly perplexing.

"It's like staying with friends in a country house," I murmured, lingering in a moment of bewilderment by his door. "Old family retainers almost, proud and delighted to put one up, eh?"

And his answer was so wholly unexpected that I waited, staring blankly into his altered eyes:

"I only hope we shall get away all right," he muttered. "I mean, that is—get off."

Evidently his former mood had flashed a moment back. "You feel tired?" I suggested sympathetically, "so do I."

"Dog-tired, yes," he answered shortly, then added in a slow, suggestive whisper—"And I feel cold, too—extraordinarily cold."

The significant, cautious way he said it made me start. But before I could prate of chills and remedies he quickly shut the door upon me, leaving those last words ringing in my brain—"cold, extraordinarily cold." And an inkling stole over me of what he meant; uninvited and unwelcome it came, then passed at once, leaving a vague uneasiness behind. For the cold he spoke of surely was not bodily cold. About my own heart, too, moved some strange touch of chill. Cold sought an entrance. But it was not common cold. Rather it was in the mind and thoughts, settled down upon the spirit. In describing his own sensations he had also described my own; for something at the very heart of me seemed turning numb. . . .

I got quickly into bed. The night was still and windless, but, though I was tired, sleep held long away. Uneasiness continued to affect me. I lay listening to the blood hurrying along the thin walls of my veins, singing and murmuring, and, when at length I dropped off, two vivid pictures haunted me into unconsciousness—his face in the doorway as he made that last remark, and the face of the girl as she had peered up so yearningly at him over the shaded candle.

Then—at once it seemed—I was wide awake again, aware, however, that an interval had

passed, but aware also of another thing that was incredible, and somehow dreadful—namely, that while I slept, the house had undergone a change. It caught me, shivering in my bed, utterly unprepared, as though unfair advantage had been taken of me while I lay unconscious. This startling idea of external alteration made me shudder. How I so instantly divined it lies beyond all explanation. I somehow realized that, while the room I woke in was the same as before, the building of which it formed a little member had known in the darkness some transmuting, substituting change that had turned it otherwise. My terror I also cannot explain, nor why, almost immediately, instead of increasing, it subtly shifted into that numbness I have already mentioned—a curious, deep bemusement of the spirit that robbed it of really acute distress.

It seemed as if only a part of me—the wakened part—knew what was going on, and that some other part remained in sleep and ignorance.

For the house was now enormous. It had experienced this weird transformation. The roof, I somehow knew, rose soaring through the darkness; the walls ran over acres; it had towers, wings and battlements, broad balconies, and magnificent windows. It had grown both dignified and ancient . . . and had swallowed up our little inn as comfortably as a palace includes a single bedroom. The blackness about me of course concealed it, but I felt the

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yawning corridors, the gape of lofty halls, high ceilings, spacious chambers, till I seemed lost in the being of some stately building that extended itself with imposing majesty upon the night.

Then came the instinct—more, perhaps, a driving impulse than a mere suggestion—to go out and see. “See what?” I asked myself, as I made my way toward the window gropingly, unwilling or afraid to strike a light. And the answer, utterly without explanation, came hard and sharp like this—

“To catch them on the lawn.”

And the curious phrase I knew was right, for the surroundings had changed equally with the house. I drew aside the curtain and peered out upon a lawn that a few hours ago had been surely a rather desolate, plain roadway, and beyond it into spacious gardens, bounded by park-like timber, where before had been but dreary, half-cultivated fields.

Through a risen mist the light of the moon shone faintly, and everywhere my sight confirmed the singular impression of extension I have mentioned, for away to the left another mass of masonry that was like the wing of some great mansion rose dimly through the air, and beneath my very eyes a projecting balcony obscured pathways and beds of flowers. Next, where a gleam of moonlight caught it, I saw the broad, slow bend of river edging the lawn through clumps of willows. Even the river had come close. And while I stared, striving

to force from so much illusion a single fact that might explain, a little tree upon the lawn just underneath moved slightly nearer, and I saw it was a human figure—a figure that I recognized. Wrapped in some long, loose garment, the daughter of the house stood there in an attitude of waiting. And the waiting was at once explained, for another figure—this time the figure of a man that seemed to me both strange and familiar at the same time—emerged from the shadows of the house to join her. She slipped into his arms. Then came a sound of horses neighing in their stalls, and the couple moved away with sudden swiftness, silently as ghosts, disappearing in the mist, while three minutes later I heard the crunch of hoofs on gravel, dying rapidly away into the distance of the night.

And here a sudden, wild reaction, not easy of analysis, rushed over me, as if that other part of me that had not waked now came sharply to the rescue, set free from the inhibition of some drug. I felt anger, disgust, resentment, and a wave of indignation that somehow I was being tricked. Impulsively—there seemed no time for judgment or reflection—I crossed the landing, now so oddly deep and lofty, and, without knocking, ran headlong into my friend's room. The bed, I saw at once, was empty, the sheets not even lain in. The furniture was in disorder, garments strewn about the floor, signs of precipitate flight in all directions. And Ducommun, of course, was gone.

What happened next confuses me when I try to think of it, for my only recollection is of hurrying distractedly to and fro between his bedroom and my own. There was a rush and scuttling in the darkness, and then I blundered heavily against walls or furniture or both, and the darkness rose up over my mind with a smothering thick curtain that blinded everything . . . and I came to my senses in the open road, my friend standing over me, enormous in the dusk, and the bit of broken wall where he had rested while I reconnoitred, just behind us. The moon was rising, the air was damp and chill, and he was shouting in my ear, "I thought you were never coming back again. I'm rested now. We'd better hurry on and do those beastly five miles to the inn."

We started, walking so briskly that we reached it in something over seventy minutes, and passing on the way no single vestige of a house nor of any kind of building. I was the silent one, but when Ducommun talked it was only to curse the desolate, sad country, and wonder why his forbears had ever chosen such a wilderness to live in. And when at length we put up at this inn which he made out was a part of his original family estate, he spent the evening poring over maps and papers, by means of which he admitted finally his calculations were all wrong. "The house itself," he said, "must have stood farther back along the road we came by. The river, you see," pointing to the dirty old chart, "has changed its course a bit since then. Its older

ALGERNON BLACKWOOD

bed lay much nearer to the *château*, flanking the garden lawn below the park." And he pointed again to the place with a finger that obviously held office pens.

From "Ten-minute Stories"

CAIN'S ATONEMENT

SO many thousands to-day have deliberately put Self aside, and are ready to yield their lives for an ideal, that it is not surprising a few of them should have registered experiences of a novel order. For to step aside from Self is to enter a larger world, to be open to new impressions. If Powers of Good exist in the universe at all, they can hardly be inactive at the present time. . . .

The case of two men, who may be called Jones and Smith, occurs to the mind in this connexion. Whether a veil actually was lifted for a moment, or whether the tension of long and terrible months resulted in an exaltation of emotion, the experience claims significance. Smith, to whom the experience came, holds the firm belief that it was real. Jones, though it involved him too, remained unaware.

It is a somewhat personal story, their peculiar relationship dating from early youth: a kind of unwilling antipathy was born between them, yet an antipathy that had no touch of hate or even of dislike. It was rather in the nature of an instinctive rivalry. Some tie operated that flung them ever into the same arena with strange persistence, and ever as opponents. An inevit-

able fate delighted to throw them together in a sense that made them rivals; small as well as large affairs betrayed this malicious tendency of the gods. It showed itself in earliest days: at school, at Cambridge, in travel, even in house-parties and the lighter social intercourse. Though distant cousins, their families were not intimate, and there was no obvious reason why their paths should fall so persistently together. Yet their paths did so, crossing and re-crossing in the way described. Sooner or later, in all his undertakings, Smith would note the shadow of Jones darkening the ground in front of him; and later, when called to the Bar in his chosen profession, he found most frequently that the learned counsel in opposition to him was the owner of this shadow, Jones. In another matter, too, they became rivals, for the same girl, oddly enough, attracted both, and though she accepted neither offer of marriage (during Smith's lifetime!), the attitude between them was that of unwilling rivals. For they were friends as well.

Jones, it appears, was hardly aware that any rivalry existed; he did not think of Smith as an opponent, and as an adversary, never. He did notice, however, the constantly recurring meetings, for more than once he commented on them with good-humoured amusement. Smith, on the other hand, was conscious of a depth and strength in the tie that certainly intrigued him; being of a thoughtful, introspective nature, he was keenly sensible of the strange competition in their lives, and sought in various ways

CAIN'S ATONEMENT

for its explanation, though without success. The desire to find out was very strong in him. And this was natural enough, owing to the singular fact that in all their battles he was the one to lose. Invariably Jones got the best of every conflict. Smith always paid, sometimes he paid with interest.

Occasionally, too, he seemed forced to injure himself while contributing to his cousin's success. It was very curious. He reflected much upon it; he wondered what the origin of their tie and rivalry might be, but especially why it was that he invariably lost, and why he was so often obliged to help his rival to the point even of his own detriment. Tempted to bitterness sometimes, he did not yield to it, however; the relationship remained frank and pleasant; if anything, it deepened.

He remembered once, for instance, giving his cousin a chance introduction which yet led, a little later, to the third party offering certain evidence which lost him an important case—Jones, of course, winning it. The third party, too, angry at being dragged into the case, turned hostile to him, thwarting various subsequent projects. In no other way could Jones have procured this particular evidence; he did not know of its existence even. That chance introduction did it all. There was nothing the least dishonourable on the part of Jones—it was just the chance of the dice. The dice were always loaded against Smith—and there were other instances of similar kind.

About this time, moreover, a singular feeling that had lain vaguely in his mind for some years past took more definite form. It suddenly assumed the character of a conviction, that yet had no evidence to support it. A voice, long whispering in the depths of him, became much louder, grew into a statement that he accepted without further ado: "I'm paying off a debt," he phrased it, "an old, old debt is being discharged. I owe him this—my help and so forth." He accepted it, that is, as just: and this certainty of justice kept sweet his heart and mind, shutting the door on bitterness or envy. The thought, however, though it recurred persistently with each encounter, brought no explanation.

When the war broke out both offered their services; as members of the O.T.C. they got commissions quickly; but it was a chance remark of Smith's that made his friend join the very regiment he himself was in. They trained together, were in the same retreats and the same advances together. Their friendship deepened. Under the stress of circumstances the tie did not dissolve, but strengthened. It was indubitably real, therefore. Then, oddly enough, they were both wounded in the same engagement.

And it was here the remarkable fate that jointly haunted them betrayed itself more clearly than in any previous incident of their long relationship—Smith was wounded in the act of protecting his cousin. How it happened is confusing to a layman, but each apparently

was leading a bombing-party, and the two parties came together. They found themselves shoulder to shoulder, both brimmed with that pluck which is complete indifference to Self; they exchanged a word of excited greeting; and the same second one of those rare opportunities of advantage presented itself which only the highest courage could make use of. Neither, certainly, was thinking of personal reward; it was merely that each saw the chance by which instant heroism might gain a surprise advantage for their side. The risk was heavy, but there *was* a chance, and success would mean a decisive result, to say nothing of high distinction for the man who obtained it—if he survived. Smith, being a few yards ahead of his cousin, had the moment in his grasp. He was in the act of dashing forward when something made him pause. A bomb in mid-air, flung from the opposing trench, was falling; it seemed immediately above him; he saw that it would just miss himself, but land full upon his cousin—whose head was turned the other way. By stretching out his hand, Smith knew he could field it like a cricket ball. There was an interval of a second and a half, he judged. He hesitated—perhaps a quarter of a second—then he acted. He caught it. It was the obvious thing to do. He flung it back into the opposing trench.

The rapidity of thought is hard to realize. In that second and a half Smith was aware of many things: He saved his cousin's life unquestionably; unquestionably, also, Jones seized

the opportunity that otherwise was his cousin's. But it was neither of these reflections that filled Smith's mind. The dominant impression was another. It flashed into actual words inside his excited brain: "I must risk it. I owe it to him—and more besides!" He was, further, aware of another impulse than the obvious one. In the first fraction of a second it was overwhelmingly established. And it was this: that the entire episode was familiar to him. A subtle familiarity was present. All this had happened before. He had already—elsewhere—seen death descending upon his cousin from the air. Yet with a difference. The 'difference' escaped him; the familiarity was vivid. That he missed the deadly detonators in making the catch, or that the fuse delayed, he called good luck. He only remembers that he flung the gruesome weapon back whence it had come, and that its explosion in the opposite trench materially helped his cousin to find glory in the place of death. The slight delay, however, resulted in his receiving a bullet through the chest—a bullet he would not have otherwise received, presumably.

It was some days later, gravely wounded, that he discovered his cousin in another bed across the darkened floor. They exchanged remarks. Jones was already 'decorated,' it seemed, having snatched success from his cousin's hands, while little aware whose help had made it possible. . . . And once again there stole across the inmost mind of Smith that strange, insistent whisper:

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"I owed it to him . . . but, by God, I owe more than that. . . . I mean to pay it too . . . !"

There was not a trace of bitterness or envy now; only this profound conviction, of obscurest origin, that it was right and absolutely just—full, honest repayment of a debt incurred. Some ancient balance of account was being settled; there was no 'chance' injustice, caprice played no *rôle* at all. . . . And a deeper understanding of life's ironies crept into him; for if everything was just, there was no room for whimpering.

And the voice persisted above the sound of busy footsteps in the ward: "I owe it . . . I'll pay it gladly . . . !"

Through the pain and weakness the whisper died away. He was exhausted. There were periods of unconsciousness, but there were periods of half-consciousness as well; then flashes of another kind of consciousness altogether, when, bathed in high, soft light, he was aware of things he could not quite account for. He *saw*. It was absolutely real. Only, the critical faculty was gone. He did not question what he saw, as he stared across at his cousin's bed. He knew. Perhaps the beaten worn-out body let something through at last. The nerves, overstrained to numbness, lay very still. The physical system, battered and depleted, made no cry. The clamour of the flesh was hushed. He was aware, however, of an undeniable exaltation of the spirit in him, as he lay and gazed toward his cousin's bed. . . .

Across the night of time, it seemed to him, the picture stole before his inner eye with a certainty that left no room for doubt. It was not the cells of memory in his brain of To-day that gave up their head, it was the eternal Self in him that remembered and understood—the soul. . . .

With that satisfaction which is born of full comprehension, he watched the light glow and spread about the little bed. Thick matting deadened the footsteps of nurses, orderlies, doctors. New cases were brought in, 'old' cases were carried out; he ignored them; he saw only the light above his cousin's bed grow stronger. He lay still and stared. It came neither from the ceiling nor the floor; it unfolded like a cloud of shining smoke. And the little lamp, the sheets, the figure framed between them—all these slid cleverly away and vanished utterly. He stood in another place that had lain behind all these appearances—a landscape with wooded hills, a foaming river, the sun just sinking below the forest, and dusk creeping from a gorge along the lonely banks. In the warm air there was a perfume of great flowers and heavy-scented trees; there were fire-flies, and the taste of spray from the tumbling river was on his lips. Across the water a large bird flapped its heavy wings, as it moved downstream to find another fishing-place. For he and his companion had disturbed it as they broke out of the thick foliage and reached the river bank. The companion, moreover, was

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his brother; they ever hunted together; there was a passionate link between them born of blood and of affection—they were twins. . . .

It all was as clear as though of yesterday. In his heart was the lust of the hunt; in his blood was the lust of woman; and thick behind these lurked the jealousy and fierce desire of a primitive day. But, though clear as of yesterday, he knew that it was of long, long ago. . . . And his brother came up close beside him, resting his bloody spear with a clattering sound against the boulders on the shore. He saw the gleaming of the metal in the sunset, he saw the shining glitter of the spray upon the boulders, he saw his brother's eyes look straight into his own. And in them shone a light that was neither the reflection of the sunset nor the excitement of the hunt just over.

"It escaped us," said his brother. "Yet I know my first spear struck."

"It followed the fawn that crossed," was the reply. "Besides, we came down wind, thus giving it warning. Our flocks, at any rate, are safer——"

The other laughed significantly.

"It is not the safety of our flocks that troubles me just now, brother," he interrupted eagerly, while the light burned more deeply in his eyes. "It is rather that *she* waits for me by the fire across the river, and that I would get to her. With your help added to my love," he went on in a trusting voice, "the gods have shown me the favour of true happiness!" He pointed with

his spear to a camp-fire on the farther bank, turning his head as he strode forward to plunge into the stream and swim across.

For a moment, then, the other felt his natural love turn into bitter hate. His own fierce passion, unconfessed, concealed, burst into instant flame. That the girl should become his brother's wife sent the blood surging through his veins in fury. He felt his life and all that he desired go down in ashes. . . . He watched his brother stride toward the water, the deerskin cast across one naked shoulder, when another object caught his practised eye. In mid-air it passed suddenly, like a shining gleam; it seemed to hang a second; then it swept swiftly forward past his head—and downward. It had leaped with a blazing fury from the overhanging bank behind; he saw the blood still streaming from its wounded flank. It must land—he saw it with a secret, awful pleasure—full upon the striding figure whose head was turned away.

The swiftness of that leap, however, was not so swift but that he could easily have used his spear. Indeed, he gripped it strongly. His skill, his strength, his aim—he knew them well enough. But hate and love, fastening upon his heart, held all his muscles still. He hesitated. He was no murderer, yet he paused. He heard the roar, the ugly thud, the crash, the cry for help—too late . . . and when, an instant afterward, his steel plunged into the great beast's heart, the human heart and life he might have saved lay still for ever. . . . He heard the water

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rushing past; an icy wind came down the gorge against his naked back; he saw the fire shine upon the farther bank . . . and the figure of a girl in skins was wading across, seeking out the shallow places in the dusk, and calling loudly as she came. . . . Then darkness hid the entire landscape, yet a darkness that was deeper, bluer than the velvet of the night alone. . . .

And he shrieked aloud in his remorseful anguish: "May the gods forgive me, for I did not mean it! Oh, that I might undo . . . that I might repay . . . !"

That his cries disturbed the weary occupants in more than one bed is certain, but he remembers chiefly that a nurse was quickly by his side, and that something she gave him soothed his violent pain and helped him into deeper sleep again. There was, he noticed, anyhow, no longer the soft, clear, blazing light about his cousin's bed. He saw only the faint glitter of the oil-lamps down the length of the great room. . . .

And some weeks later he went back to fight. The picture, however, never left his memory. It stayed with him as an actual reality that was neither delusion nor hallucination. He believed that he understood at last the meaning of the tie that had fettered him and puzzled him so long. The memory of those far-off days of shepherding beneath the stars of long ago remained vividly beside him. He kept his secret, however. In many a talk with his cousin beneath the nearer stars of Flanders no word of it ever passed his lips.

ALGERNON BLACKWOOD

The friendship between them, meanwhile, experienced a curious deepening, though unacknowledged in any spoken words. Smith, at any rate, on his side, put into it an affection that was a brave man's love. He watched over his cousin. In the fighting especially, when possible, he sought to protect and shield him, regardless of his own personal safety. He delighted secretly in the honours his cousin had already won. He himself was not yet even mentioned in dispatches, and no public distinction of any kind had come his way.

His V.C. eventually—well, he was no longer occupying his body when it was bestowed. He had already 'left.' . . . He was now conscious, possibly, of other experiences besides that one of ancient, primitive days when he and his brother were shepherding beneath other stars. But the reckless heroism which saved his cousin under fire may later enshrine another memory which, at some far future time, shall reawaken as a 'hallucination' from a Past that to-day is called the Present. . . . The notion, at any rate, flashed across his mind before he 'left.'

From "Day and Night Stories"

